Robert Bizzozero

1 08

THE HON. ROBERT BIZZARD

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

THE REV. ROBERT BIZZARO

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE TEACHING OF THE BIBLE AND PRAYER BOOK

BY THE

REV. ALFRED G. MORTIMER, D.D.

RECTOR OF S. MARKS, PHILADELPHIA; AUTHOR OF "HELPS TO MEDITATION," "CATHOLIC FAITH AND PRACTICE," ETC.

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

NEW YORK AND BOMBAY

1906

Copyright, 1906, *by*
ALFRED G. MORTIMER.

All rights reserved

The Plimpton Press Norwood Mass. U. S. A.

TO THOSE DEAR SOULS FOR WHOM CHRIST DIED, WHO ARE NOW TIED AND BOUND BY THE CHAIN OF THEIR SINS, WITH THE EARNEST PRAYER THAT THEY MAY COME TO KNOW THE POWER OF HIS PRECIOUS BLOOD IN THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE, THESE PAGES ARE AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

PREFACE

Last summer a well-known layman of New York, the Hon. Elbridge T. Gerry, who happened to have read a sermon of mine on Absolution,[1] urged me to work out its argument more fully than the limits of a sermon allowed, and to add to it answers to some of the objections commonly brought against Confession and Absolution. This little book is the outcome of his request.

Mr. Gerry had made a collection of nearly all the books, large and small, on this subject, which had been published of late years in the Anglican Communion, and we went over them together. Some were excellent from the historical and theological standpoint, but too exclusively dogmatic. Others, again, took a line so apologetic (in the common sense of the term) as to render them quite useless for the purpose we had in view, namely, to provide a Manual which could be placed in the hands of lay people desirous of informing themselves in regard to the doctrine and practice of Confession in our Church.

[1] In "Life and Its Problems" (the World's Pulpit Series), Masters & Co., 78 New Bond Street, London.

It seemed to us that the most practical treatment of the subject would take the form of an investigation of the teaching of the Bible and Prayer Book in the light of Catholic theology, and that this should be sufficiently simple in method to appeal to any intelligent layman. Further, that the work should be constructive in that it should present a coherent view of the doctrine of Holy Scripture as interpreted by the declarations of the Book of Common Prayer, and that it should be uncontroversial except where it was necessary to answer objections ordinarily brought against Confession and Absolution.

Bearing in mind the popular idea that only youthful enthusiasts and sentimental women used Confession, it seemed to me that some weight might attach to the testimony of two men, neither of them young, one a layman well known in his own country [1] as a man of affairs, for forty-five

[1] As he is probably not known to people in England I append, *without his knowledge*, the following extract from the Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. VIII: "Gerry, Elbridge Thomas, American lawyer and philanthropist: b. New York, 25 Dec. 1837. He was graduated from Columbia in 1857, was admitted to the bar in 1860, and was a member of the State constitutional convention of New York, 1867. Subsequently he became an associate of Henry Bergh in the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, of which he was for many years vice-president. In 1874 he was the leading organizer of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, of which he was the

years a member of the New York bar; the other a priest who for nearly forty years has himself used Confession, and for more than thirty years has been called by God's Providence, not only to hear Confessions, but to devote a large part of his ministry to this work.

Mr. Gerry's interest in the book manifests his desire that others should come to know a means of grace, which has been to him so full of blessing.

For myself I am thankful to bear witness that my own first Confession was the direct and immediate cause of my vocation to the Priesthood, and that of the many thousands of Confessions I have heard there have been but few that have not borne fruit unto increased holiness of life. It is with extreme reluctance that I refer to a matter so entirely personal, but as many of the objections to Confession rest solely upon the opinion of those who have had no personal experience of it, it seems

president in 1876–91, and which became so closely identified with his name as often popularly to be termed the Gerry Society. He was chairman of the commission on capital punishment which substituted execution by electricity for that by hanging, in New York State (1886–8). He also held many important offices of trust, and became known for his interest in yachting affairs, having been commodore of the New York Yacht Club in 1886–93. He is a grandson of Elbridge Gerry ('Governor of Massachusetts, Vice-President of the United States, and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence')."

only right that some who have should be willing to give their testimony on the other side.

A. G. M.

S. Mark's, Philadelphia,
Epiphany, 1906.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Forgiveness of Sins	1
II.	The Malice of Sin	17
III.	Absolution	31
IV.	Contrition	50
V.	Confession	60
VI.	Satisfaction	75
VII.	How to make a Good Confession	84
VIII.	Objections to Absolution	96
IX.	Objections to Confession	116
X.	Conclusion	133

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

CHAPTER I

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

THE most momentous question for each of us, when we come to die, that on which our eternity is depending, will be, Are my sins forgiven? For if there be one doctrine accepted alike by all Christians, and probably by all who believe in a hereafter for the soul, it is that no man can be saved by his sinlessness; that all have sinned, and need the forgiveness of God; that the greatest saint as well as the greatest sinner, when standing face to face with God's judgment, must plead for mercy.

We say in the Creed that we believe in "the forgiveness of sins." In a sense this is, indeed, the most precious truth of our religion, it is revealed in the God-given name of Jesus, *Saviour*, and stands on the first page of the Gospel; for the angel, in making known to Joseph the mystery of the Incarnation, said, "Thou shalt call His name

Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins."[1] It is the most intensely personal article of the Creed; for a belief in all its other articles would be of little avail unless we believed in the forgiveness of sins. The devils believe in God, and tremble;[2] but they do not believe in their own capacity for forgiveness. It is, therefore, scarcely possible to lay too much stress upon the importance to each of us of that dogma in which we profess our faith whenever we say the Creed, and which we put in practice whenever we say the Lord's Prayer. For surely the petition "Forgive us our trespasses" is the petition on which all the rest of the prayer more or less depends. Unless our sins be forgiven we cannot hallow God's Name; we cannot pray that His Kingdom may come; we cannot do His will; we dare not ask for His Heavenly Bread. Unless our sins be forgiven we are not likely to be kept from temptation; we cannot be delivered from the Evil One.

I believe in "the forgiveness of sins." I pray "Forgive us our trespasses." But are *my* sins forgiven? I cannot afford to wait till my death-bed to answer that question, if there is any way of answering it now. To put it from me is folly; to evade the true answer is self-deceit. It is the question of all questions for each soul. Let us,

[1] S. Matt. i. 21. [2] Cf. S. James ii. 19.

therefore, quietly consider it, earnestly asking God's light that we may be led to answer it truly. In this work the Collect for Whitsunday will help us, if we use it diligently.

"O God, Who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people, by sending to them the light of Thy Holy Spirit; Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end."

Are *my* sins forgiven? We must first carefully investigate our conceptions of the two words, "forgiveness" and "sin." Most people suppose that they know exactly what they mean by these words; and yet a little examination of them will show that there are many erroneous ideas about forgiveness and sin, and that probably our own view of them is very inadequate. In this chapter let us take up the subject of forgiveness, and in the next consider the meaning of sin.

The most important teaching in the New Testament in regard to forgiveness is summed up in our Lord's answer to the question of S. Peter, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" Our Lord replies, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until

seventy times seven." And then follows the parable of the unmerciful servant. "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had

compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."[1]

The first thought suggested by our Lord's answer is full of comfort for the sinner; for it tells us of the illimitable character of God's mercy. Not seven times, as S. Peter asks, but seventy times seven; that is, there is no limit to the frequency with which we ought to be ready to forgive, because there is no limit to the number of times God is ready to forgive us. There is a Collect in our Prayer Book which beautifully expresses this truth in the words, "O God, whose nature and property is ever to have mercy and to forgive." Forgiveness is but an aspect of God's attribute of mercy; and God's attributes are manifestations of His nature. Because God is Love He is Merciful; because He is Merciful His nature and property is ever to forgive — that is, without limit in regard to the frequency of His forgiveness or to the magnitude of the sins forgiven. So far as God is concerned, neither the number of our sins nor their greatness can ever be a bar to the exercise of His mercy and

[1] S. Matt. xviii. 21–35.

love. He forgives not seven times, but seventy times seven. God's mercy is so stupendous that it can pardon always, and can pardon every sin.

But the parable which follows our Lord's answer to S. Peter's question opens up for us a much more difficult subject. Is God's forgiveness *unconditional*, and does forgiveness merely imply the remission of certain penalties? The man in the parable was hopelessly in debt to his lord, but in response to his prayer, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all," his lord was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

This seems very simple and easy to understand, but what follows suggests a serious difficulty. "The same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because

thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

Here we have, both in the action of the king and in the lesson which our Lord Himself draws from the parable, a difficulty which challenges our attention, and sends us back to the reconsideration of our conceptions of forgiveness; for it is quite clear that our Lord would impress upon us the fact that forgiveness is not unconditional. In the parable the king, in spite of the magnitude of the debt, forgives at the prayer, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." The servant, however, in response to precisely the same prayer, refuses to forgive his fellow-servant who owes him but a trifling sum. The king hears of this, and withdraws his own forgiveness, thus showing that it was conditional. And our Lord tells us that His Heavenly Father acts towards us upon the same principle; that is, that God's forgiveness is, *in some sense*, conditional upon our after conduct. To many this has seemed a great difficulty; that God, after having freely forgiven, should

withdraw His forgiveness on account of some further sin. Such action in man, some would say, would be deemed unjust; for a man cannot be called to account or punished for a sin which has been pardoned. Can we, therefore, conceive this of God?

This brings us to the questions we have already asked: Is God's forgiveness unconditional? and does forgiveness imply nothing more than the remission of certain penalties? If this were all that is involved in our conception of forgiveness, surely there would be many cases in which forgiveness would be cruel, because it would injure the recipient, and it would therefore be inconsistent with true love in Him who forgives, and also of true righteousness, which is only another way of saying that it would be a sin against justice. Forgiveness is so evidently the manifestation of love and of righteousness that we cannot conceive of any exercise of forgiveness which would involve what was unloving and unrighteous. This is true, of course, of man's forgiveness of his fellow-man. How much more so of God's forgiveness of the sinner.

Let us begin with human justice. We shall find that in its administration punishment is intended to be first penal, and, where possible, also disciplinary; but always penal; that is, for the

purpose of vindicating the majesty of the law which has been violated, and of deterring the offender from repeating his offence; and still further, of deterring others from following his example. This is the primary object sought in judicial punishment. The discipline or improvement of the offender, however much to be desired, is really secondary.

Now, if criminals knew that they would never be punished, because the law of charity in Christian communities required that they should always be forgiven, there would be no check to crime, and no opportunity of reforming the criminal; so that the very charity — which always and under all circumstances obliged forgiveness — would foster and encourage crime, and injure both the individual and society. This, however, is not so where the power of occasional pardon is lodged in the hands of certain authorities, its exercise being confined to cases in which extenuating circumstances can be pleaded for the offence, or in which there seems good hope that a free pardon will lead to the reformation of the offender.

While human justice is imperfect, because it is administered by those who are human and therefore sinful, yet the conception of justice and its principles were implanted in man by God; so that we cannot conceive of the Divine justice being

inconsistent with those principles, though we recognize that in their application it will be higher and more perfect. We have seen that it is the nature and property of God ever to forgive; that there is no limit with respect to the number of times, no measure of the greatness of the sins which God will forgive. And yet surely there must be some *condition* to be fulfilled in order that God's forgiveness may be obtained; for otherwise forgiveness, as we have seen, would only be an encouragement to sin, and an injury to the sinner. God's forgiveness flows from His love. But love seeks always the true good, not the injury, of its object. It is, therefore, impossible to conceive of God's forgiveness being bestowed where it would do harm.

The condition on which forgiveness depends surely is that there must be in the recipient a capacity to appropriate and use rightly God's gift. In other words, the recipient must be *forgivable*; and God, Who knows the heart of man, must see in the object of His love, possibilities of recovery and restoration, which His forgiveness will stimulate and foster. For this is precisely the condition under which, as we have already observed, in the administration of human justice, the power of occasional pardon is lodged in the hands of certain authorities. That power certainly must not be used by them indis-

criminately; for this would encourage crime, and injure both society and the criminal. Whereas the only justification for its exercise is that it shall not be inconsistent with true righteousness or justice, and that it shall have for its purpose the reformation or future moral improvement of the offender. It will therefore follow, from the principles of human justice, that, although God is ever ready to forgive, He must see in the individual such dispositions of heart as will render His forgiveness beneficial, not injurious, to that man; that is, He must see possibilities of moral change, possibilities of future good.

If a sinner knew that he had merely to ask to be forgiven, to secure that great gift, forgiveness would rather be an encouragement to sin than a help to a better life. But this condition that a man must be *forgivable*, that is, must have a disposition of heart which will enable him to appropriate God's gift without injury to himself, is precisely what we mean by penitence.

Penitence involves many things; chief among them, a real sorrow for sin, a sorrow which has its root not in the penal consequences of sin, but in the love of God. There is a sorrow which is caused either by disappointment at the loss of reward, or by fear of punishment. But the sorrow which alone is worthy the name of penitence must be

rooted in love. We must repent of our sins, not because of their effect upon us, but because they are hateful to God, Whom we love, and Whose love we have outraged by sin. This is the kind of sorrow we mean when we pray for "a new and contrite heart."

But there is another thing which generally goes with this contrition, so that they cannot really be separated, and that is a moral change. This is the meaning of the Greek word (*μετάνοια*) in the New Testament generally translated "penitence." Before God can forgive He must see in the sinner the possibility of this moral change, and, further, the desire for it, though these two are really but one. For, if we have the capacity to repent, we shall have the desire; that is, God the Holy Ghost will awaken in our hearts this desire, and He Who thus begins the good work of penitence in us will complete and perfect it, unless we hinder Him, leading us on through all the various stages of penitence by which pardon is not only obtained but appropriated, and a renewed spiritual life is secured.

If, however, this be true, and it seems impossible to doubt it, the difficulty in the parable vanishes; since it is quite evident that in the unmerciful servant there was no moral change, for after having sought for mercy, and obtained far more than he asked — he only pleaded for time to pay, and

received remission of the whole debt — he immediately met a similar prayer from his fellow-servant with stern refusal and severe punishment; thus showing that the pardon obtained had worked no improvement in him, had done him no moral good, but, on the contrary, had *put him in a position* in which he was enabled to commit further sin by his cruelty to his fellow-servant; for *this* he could not have done had his lord refused forgiveness, and cast him into prison.

We need very carefully to observe that our Lord does not say that His Father would act in *precisely* the same manner; that is, would forgive and then take back the forgiveness; but that He would act in a similar manner. The word translated likewise (οὕτως) "refers to similitudes and comparisons, and serves to adapt them to the case in hand." In the passage "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,"[1] the word "so" is the same word that is translated "so likewise" in our parable. The previous verse there is, "Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house"; and the only part of the similitude which is adapted in the second verse is the giving light unto all that are in the house, not the avoidance of a bushel and the use

[1] S. Matt. v. 16.

of a candlestick. In the parable of the unmerciful servant, therefore, the "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses," refers to what has just gone before, that the wicked servant shall be delivered to the tormentors till he shall pay all that was due unto him, and not that he should be first forgiven and then the forgiveness withdrawn.

Parables are but human analogies, and can seldom be applied in all their parts. They are illustrations of Divine truth, not absolute and accurate expressions of it. What seems to us unjust in the action of the king is, after the forgiveness of the servant, the recalling of that forgiveness on account of a subsequent sin. But this difficulty arises from the fact that the human king could not know the condition of his servant's character, or that his forgiveness would be so unworthily used — even as an opportunity for committing fresh sin against his fellow-servant. God, however, does know the condition of each man's soul, whether the sinner is forgivable, that is, has such dispositions of penitence as enable him to appropriate and rightly use the gift of forgiveness or not. And if God sees that the sinner has not these dispositions, He does not forgive; for if we turn to the parallel passage in the Sermon on the Mount,

we read, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

God knows whether our penitence is real, whether it will lead to a moral change in us; and if He knows that we are incapable of that change, He does not forgive, even though the sinner may obtain absolution from God's minister. Indeed, this is very much the case in point. Many a man may seek the absolution of his sins after confession, and yet his penitence may be so imperfect, either from an insincere confession, or from want of sorrow for sin or lack of purpose of amendment, that he will be incapable of appropriating the gift which is bestowed in absolution. He obtains the absolution, as the servant in the parable did, but he is unable to use it, that is, he never appropriates it.

As we have seen, God's forgiveness flows from His love, and it is impossible to conceive of that forgiveness being bestowed where it would do harm. In the parable it did do the servant harm; for it gave him the opportunity of committing fresh sin against his fellow-servant. The difficulty which so many have found in the parable lies in the inadequacy of the human analogy to fully represent the Divine application of its principles. It is not God who first forgives and then takes back his forgiveness, but the *human* king. What our Lord reveals, is that if ye forgive not men their

trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. This is the great principle of God's mercy and justice, set forth in the Sermon on the Mount, which our Lord illustrates by the parable of the unmerciful servant. We must interpret the parable by the positive revelation in the Sermon on the Mount, not that revelation by the parable.

We are now probably in a position to correct what is erroneous in our conception of forgiveness. We have seen that on God's side it cannot be unconditional, since that would often mean the injury of the sinner; but that it always involves capacity and desire for moral change, that is, repentance.

CHAPTER II

THE MALICE OF SIN

We have investigated our conception of forgiveness, and have found that it postulates certain dispositions in the recipient. Now let us consider carefully what we mean by sin. We are met at the outset of our task by certain conditions which make it very difficult for us to obtain a true and adequate view of sin, whether from the intellectual or moral standpoint. By this I mean that from our position in a sinful world it is by no means easy to *know* intellectually what sin is, or to *grasp* morally its intrinsic malice. The conditions which make this so difficult are chiefly four.

First, there is a *familiarity* with sin, which comes from our daily contact with a sinful world; for in the world sin is all around us, and we inhale, as it were, an atmosphere charged with sin. We hear so much about it, and become so familiarized with it, that we lose that delicate moral sensitiveness which ought to enable us at once to realize what sin is. We are so much a part of the phenomenon we are examining, so close to it, that it is extremely

difficult to form an accurate judgment of it in its true relation to God and the soul. If we could only stand apart from this sinful world, and regard it from outside, we might obtain a just view of sin in its intrinsic malice, and in its relation to God and ourselves. This is what we must try to do — to look upon sin as God sees it, and not as the world regards it. Such a view of sin we can never obtain by our own unaided intellect. We must earnestly ask for the help of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to convince the world of sin.

Our Blessed Lord said to His disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will convince the world of sin."[1] We must pray the Holy Ghost to enlighten our understandings that we may see sin in some measure as God sees it, or at least as the holy angels see it, and beseech Him to strengthen our wills that we may hate it, as indeed we shall hate it if only we realize its enormity.

The second condition which renders it difficult to obtain an adequate conception of sin is the prevalence around us of entirely erroneous views on this subject. The world in which we live, that is, society, has its views of sin; and there is great

[1] S. John xvi. 7–8.

danger of unconsciously accepting these opinions or at least of allowing our judgment to be warped by them. For example, the world thinks lightly of all those sins which do not fall under the condemnation of its own code of morals. It considers those sins very bad which its tribunals punish, or which occasion the loss of one's reputation; but all others are regarded as very light. So that really the greatest sin, in the world's estimation, is "being found out." The world practically says, Do what you like, only don't be found out.

Then society calls sins by euphemistic names, and forgets that they are sins; as, when a young man is living in intemperance, impurity, wasting his glorious manhood, outraging the holiness of God, and often ruining his fellow-creatures, the world speaks of him as only "sowing his wild oats." The world has a sort of theory of the *necessity* of sin — that we cannot help sinning, and therefore need not worry very much about it. If this were the case, if we really could not help sinning, God, Who is absolute Justice, could not punish us for it.

Again, people make excuses for their sins by blaming their circumstances or those among whom their lives are cast. The answer is very simple. These things are only *temptations*, and if we use all the means of grace diligently we shall have strength to resist them; or if we have not, then we

ought not to remain in such surroundings. For our Lord says on more than one occasion, "If thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire." [1] There can be no doubt of the meaning of these words — that occasions of sin are to be avoided at all cost. If our surroundings are such that even the most diligent use of the means of grace does not enable us to resist the temptations they bring upon us, we must at any sacrifice remove ourselves from the danger.

A third difficulty which has to be recognized is our own deceitful heart[2] and our self-love, which make it almost impossible for us to obtain a really just view of ourselves. We all know how glaring the faults of others appear to us, faults of which they are apparently quite unconscious, and, if we are not blinded by self-deceit, we shall realize that there are probably many faults which others see in us, of which we are entirely ignorant; and the cause is that self-love which makes it so difficult for a man to obtain a just estimate of himself.

But last, and worst of all, we have to take into consideration the fact that there is ever by our side a lying spirit whose one work it is to deceive us

[1] S. Matt. xviii. 8; Cf. S. Matt. v. 29. [2] Cf. Jer. xvii. 9.

regarding our true condition, lest, horrified by our sins, we should, indeed, repent and escape from his bondage. When we think seriously of our sins, the devil is always ready to whisper in our ear some plausible reason why we need not consider *that* sin so very bad and to remind us, on the other hand, of all our noble intentions and holy aspirations, though they probably never produced any fruit.

As we have already intimated, the remedy for these difficulties is the help of the Holy Ghost. He must *convince* us of sin if we are ever truly to know ourselves. We must begin the work of self-examination, as the woman in the parable began the search for her lost piece of silver, by lighting a candle, the candle of the Holy Ghost. Then, and not till then, shall we be able to sweep the house of our soul of the sins which defile it, and to discover beneath them, impressed upon us, the image of God.

But what is sin? For thus far we have been only clearing the ground, so to speak, by pointing out some of the erroneous theories about sin, and some of the conditions which make it difficult to obtain a true view of this awful subject. With this in mind let us examine what sin is. The word itself most generally used[1] both in the Old and

[1] There are other words used for sin.

New Testament signifies (if we regard its etymon) "missing a mark." So that from this point of view sin is regarded as the failure of the purpose of life, the erring from the way which leads to the goal, a deflection from our aim, a *not* doing our duty. If, however, we look for a *definition* of sin, we find it best in the words of S. John, "Sin is the transgression of the law," [1] which may be more accurately translated, "Sin is lawlessness."

God's perfections are the law of His own Being, and God has written upon the conscience of man, even in the state of nature, an outline of these perfections; for He has made man to know that there is a difference between right and wrong. The moral law of God is His revelation of Himself to man; and this law is written not only upon man's conscience but in the Holy Scriptures, and in the precepts of the Church. When a man breaks this law, in thought, word, or deed, he commits sin; for he shows himself to be lawless as regards God.

The malice of sin consists in an intelligent creature, who has the power of free will, and derives both that intelligence and that free will from God, deliberately and consciously rebelling against the will of his Creator. The essential malice of sin is in the *will* of man. But its intrinsic malice is

[1] 1 S. John iii. 4.

aggravated by the character of the God against Whom he sins (that He is Holy, Just, and Good), as well as by our obligations to Him, not only for the gift of life and all implied in that gift, but also for the very power which we use against God when we sin. If therefore we are to measure the enormity of the act of rebellion which sin involves, we must consider the difference between God and ourselves, between His infinite greatness, majesty, and goodness, and our own nothingness. Since all that we have is God's gift, sin is not only an act of reckless rebellion but also of basest ingratitude.

God has given us three great revelations of the malice of sin, two in Holy Scripture, and one in nature itself. These three revelations are the Passion of Jesus Christ, the punishment of hell, and the miseries of earth.

Let us begin with the last. Nature itself bears witness in no uncertain terms to the inherent evil of sin, which is indeed the most terrible force we meet in this life; for to it may be traced all the miseries of earth, all the pain and sorrow and disease and suffering and decay which blight and mar the fairest creatures of this world. If we look for the effects of sin around us, we find them everywhere; for there is not a spot in this world wherein some marks of sin may not be found. This earth is indeed beautiful, and yet sin is the force in it which

is at work destroying the beauty of everything; for sin mars, spoils, wrecks, ruins everything in nature. We find it in ourselves, checking and perverting our best impulses, fostering and stimulating all that is evil in us, appealing to the bad side of our character. We recognize it in every one we meet. There may be much that is noble and grand, and yet we know that in each one sin is at work spoiling, so far as it can, their life.

But let us look at the effects of sin in their more terrible forms. Pass through the wards of a great hospital in which every kind of disease is treated. What is sin? Lawlessness. And what causes disease? Broken laws — immediately the broken laws of physical health; but very often we may trace those broken physical laws back to broken moral laws. How terrible it is to contemplate the sufferings of diseased humanity; and yet, if we think seriously, they are but the effects of something more terrible still — sin.

Pass from the hospital to a prison, and visit the cells in which criminals are confined! Hear of the crimes which they have committed, crimes of violence and lust and robbery; examine those hardened faces on which sin has set its stamp. What is sin? Lawlessness. Every one of the prisoners in the jail is confined there for some outbreak against law, not the laws of physical health

only, as in the hospitals, but the laws of the state, and almost always those are connected with the laws of God. Study fallen humanity in the jails of a great city. Investigate the degradation to which it is possible for even the highest to be reduced. Ask what caused it. Sin. And from this learn something of the awfulness of sin.

Let us, however, turn from nature to revelation, and we shall find two great chapters of it which bring before us the the terrible effects of sin. The first is the Passion of Jesus Christ. All proclaim Him to have been the best, the holiest, the most gentle, the most unselfish Man that ever trod this earth, while Christians fall down and adore Him as the Son of God. He was sinless. There was never one thought of sin to bring the blush of shame to His cheek; and yet He had to live in a sinful world, and bear for our sakes the effects of sin which we see manifesting their diabolical fury in His Passion and Death upon the Cross. We may follow Him step by step in His Passion, and at every stage recognize clearly the handiwork of sin. We must do this for ourselves, if we really desire to obtain any adequate view of the evil of sin, but space does not permit us here to do more than draw attention to a few of the manifestations of the cruelty of sin as exhibited in the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ.

The scourging of His pure and tender Body! It was a horrible punishment; for a Roman scourge was no plaything. But what is the phantom which wields the scourge which cuts into the Flesh of our Blessed Lord? Sin personified.

The mockery of Christ! Who put it into the hearts of those soldiers to mock their God but he to whom all sin may be traced — the devil?

And then the crown of thorns with which our Lord expiated our sins of thought! The tangled mass of thorns that pressed upon the Head of Jesus, so that they pierced His sacred brow to the very bone, suggests those sins of thought (all tangled and platted together like the thorns) which Jesus was then expiating; and among those sins of thought were thoughts of cruelty, such as impelled His executioners to this particular punishment; and, indeed, all those sins of thought which have suggested wicked *deeds* — and probably every sin in deed has originated in a sin of thought.

Then Pilate presents our Lord to the people, saying, Behold the Man! Look at Him; look at that perfect Form, that fairest Face, torn and bleeding with scourges and thorns, the victim of cruelty, the victim of sin! Listen to the shouts of the mob, Crucify Him! Crucify Him! The same sin which wielded the scourges is now di-

recting the voices of the people to clamour for the death of the Son of God.

Pass on and behold His Crucifixion. Those dear Feet which had carried Him about on errands of love and mercy are nailed to the Cross. Those dear Hands which had never struck an angry blow, never done a wicked action, which had healed the sick and blessed the people, are fastened by nails to the wooden beam.

But what was the force which suggested and directed all this cruelty? The force of sin — your sin and my sin; for we must not think of our Lord's Crucifixion merely as something which took place some two thousand years ago — a scene full of deep pathos and regret, but as having no special relation to ourselves. Our sins to-day crucify Christ as truly as sin did when He was on earth. He was God, and sin killed Him, the Son of God. It was an act of deicide. But what is sin in each one of us? It is deicide. It is killing that which is divine in us. It is crucifying Christ in us. It is killing God in our soul.

Our Lord said just before His Passion, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."[1] Sooner or later, for mercy or judgment, all men are attracted to the Cross of Jesus Christ, to find in it their redemption, or (by rejecting

[1] S. John xii. 32.

Christ's mercy) their condemnation. The Cross, as it stands lifted up with Jesus Christ dying upon it, is the most pathetic revelation of the malice of sin and the love of God. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, and sin so hated God that it crucified that Son.

And the scene on Calvary lives on for all time. Day by day in every life the love of God is manifested, and day by day in every life either sin crucifies that which is divine in us, or God's love expels what is evil in us. But for each of us the Passion remains the great revelation of what sin can do, what sin does do in marring and killing all that is fairest in human nature.

There is yet another revelation of the bitterness of sin, the revelation of Hell. We should first ask ourselves who it is who tells us about Hell. It is not the stern prophets of the Old Testament, not S. John the Baptist, the severe preacher of penitence; but our Lord Jesus Christ. It is from the lips of our gentle, loving Lord that we gather almost all that we know of Hell; and it is part of His love that He reveals it to us so plainly. He does so that we may know the awful results of sin in eternity. We have traced them in this world in the suffering and misery we see around us. We have seen them in our Lord's Passion, in the Crucifixion and Death of the Son of God. But He would have

us go beyond this world, and in revealing to us the awfulness of Hell He shows us the effects of sin in eternity.

I shall say nothing of the outer darkness, of the weeping and gnashing of teeth,[1] of the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched,[2] but ask you for a few brief minutes to consider only what it is to be lost in Hell — putting aside the pains of hell, putting aside the companionship of the wicked and devils — to think what it is to be lost. All opportunities of good are gone forever. I have lost my life, that one life given me that I might prepare for heaven. I have lost my soul created by God, washed in Baptism, fed upon the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Communion, made in the image of God, endowed with a desire to know God, and with the power of loving God. I have lost that soul. I have lost the friendship of God and of the saints. I have lost my earthly friends and relations. Life, soul, heaven, eternal joy, friendship of God, the company of the angels! Yet this is only part of the punishment of Hell — the punishment of loss. And then to reproach me there is the worm of conscience ever saying, It was my own fault; I chose this place; I was warned again and again; Jesus Christ in the Gospel

[1] Cf. S. Matt. viii. 12; xiii. 42; xxii. 13; xxiv. 51; xxv. 30.
[2] Cf. S. Mark ix. 48.

Himself told me of this place of misery, but I would have my own way, and this is the result of my own way. I chose sin rather than holiness, rather than God, and this Hell is the eternal consequences of sin.

The world thinks lightly of sin, speaks lightly of sin, tries to forget the awfulness of sin. But if I will regard them, there stand clearly before my eyes three great revelations of the awfulness of sin — the miseries of earth, the Passion of Jesus Christ, and the existence of Hell.

Meditate on these things; ask the Holy Ghost to help you, and you will gradually come to have — I do not say an adequate conception of the fearfulness of sin, but a truer view of its bitterness, of its intrinsic malice; and when you have this deeper view of sin, when you realize that it is the one great evil of this world, ask yourselves, Are *my* sins forgiven?

CHAPTER III

ABSOLUTION

By considering the character and conditions of forgiveness, and the malice of sin, we have endeavoured thus far to clear the ground for the question, Are my sins forgiven? We must now carry the subject a step further, by investigating what provision, if any, our Lord has made in the Gospels and in His Church for the administration of the great gift of forgiveness.

We have stated that the most important article of the Creed, for the individual Christian, is, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins"; the most stirring petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses." But has God appointed in His Church any means by which I can obtain the forgiveness of my sins? I believe with my whole heart that "He (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."[1] I recognize, further, that I must fulfil certain conditions, in order that I may appropriate His forgiveness; in other words, that I must be forgivable. But in a matter of such tremendous

[1] 1 S. John i. 9.

importance to my salvation a further question arises: Has God in Holy Scripture indicated any means by which I may obtain the *assurance* of His forgiveness? Does the Church, of which I am a member, point to any sacramental act by which I may secure this precious gift?

To both these questions I would answer with an emphatic affirmative. In the very passage we have just quoted, S. John says, "If we *confess* our sins, He (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," where Confession is stated to be a condition of forgiveness. And in his Gospel we read that Christ, on His first appearance to His apostles assembled in the upper chamber on Easter Day, breathed on them, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them";[1] that is, Christ bestowed upon them the power to absolve or forgive sins. Our church has thought good to order that daily, in her Morning and Evening Prayer, we should be reminded of this gift; for, after a confession of general sinfulness (rather than of sins), the priest is directed to announce that "Almighty God . . . hath given power, and commandment, to His Ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins."

[1] S. John xx. 22, 23.

Before we examine the evidence for Confession in the Bible and in the Church, it will be well to notice that every other sacramental gift is confirmed to us by some objective sign, and through some outward act. We believe that we are regenerated in Baptism. But it is not enough for us to *think* that we are regenerated, to have a subjective conviction that we have received the new birth; we must go on to the Sacrament of Baptism, which is to us an objective sign that we have received that gift, a sign instituted by Christ Himself. In the same way, it is not left to us to *hope* that we have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We know we have received them through the objective sign of the laying on of the bishop's hands in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Yet again, we are not satisfied with feeding upon the Body and Blood of Christ in spiritual communion only; but we come to that Sacrament of Christ's institution, the Holy Communion, in which we objectively receive His Body and Blood. We find, therefore, that for each great sacramental gift Christ has provided a definite means by which the gift may be conveyed, an objective sign as a "pledge to assure us" that we have received it.

Now the forgiveness of sins is quite as important to our salvation as the gifts of the Holy Ghost or the feeding upon the Body and Blood of Christ; for

without the forgiveness of sins all else is useless. Arguing from the analogy of the other sacraments, therefore, is it not reasonable that we should expect some sacramental ordinance through which we may receive the gift of forgiveness, and by which we may have assurance that we have so received it. Let us now turn to the New Testament and see what provision is there made for the sacramental bestowal of the forgiveness of sins; in other words, for Absolution.

The forgiveness of sins was won for us by our Lord's death upon the Cross, whereby He made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world. And immediately after His resurrection from the dead, on the evening of Easter Day, on the occasion of His first appearance to His apostles in the upper chamber at Jerusalem, our Lord instituted Absolution; for He said, "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." [1]

He begins by proclaiming, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." One of the pur-

[1] S. John xx. 21–23.

poses certainly for which the Father had sent Him was to forgive sins; for S. John the Baptist, when first he pointed Christ out to his disciples, uttered these words: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." [1] And our Lord said to the sick of the palsy, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," and, reading the evil thoughts in the hearts of the scribes, He gave them a sign that they might "know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." [2]

If it be objected that the forgiveness of sins was only one of the purposes for which the Father had sent His Son into this world, and that perhaps this was not the purpose our Lord had in mind when He said, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you," we have only to point to the next verse wherein our Lord specifies this and this only as the purpose for which He sent them forth; for He said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." He does not here allude to the preaching of the Gospel even, but only to the forgiveness of sin.

While S. John alone records the authoritative transmission to the apostles, on Easter Day, of the power to remit sin, S. Matthew notices two occasions on which our Lord promises this gift. The first was S. Peter's great confession of Christ's

[1] S. John i. 29. [2] S. Matt. ix. 6.

Divinity; for we read that after saying, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," He added, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." [1] And, lest we should suppose that this power of binding and loosing was confined to S. Peter, we read that on a later occasion Christ said to all the apostles, "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." [2]

We may notice that our Lord does not say to S. Peter, "I give," but "I *will* give." The promise is of a future gift. And this promise was fulfilled immediately after our Lord's triumph over sin and death, when on Easter Day He said to all the assembled apostles, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." Here the promised gift is bestowed.

It is with these words that our Church directs the bishop to ordain each priest. And surely they are worse than mockery unless the Church intends

[1] S. Matt. xvi. 19. [2] S. Matt. xviii. 18.

to convey to that priest that power to forgive sins which they express. As I have already pointed out, she directs that her people be reminded, twice every day, that "Almighty God . . . hath given power, and commandment, to His Ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins." And certainly the occasion when that power was given was the moment when the bishop laid his hands upon the priest's head, and uttered the solemn words which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke to His disciples, adapting them thus for the ordination to the priesthood: "Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the Imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained." The bishop, following our Lord's example, in ordaining to the priesthood specifies only one of the functions of a priest, that is, to minister Absolution. And yet there are some persons in our Church who think that she does not teach that a priest can absolve.

Before we pass from the testimony of the Gospels in regard to Absolution, it may be well to compare the frequency of our Lord's teaching on this subject with what is recorded in the Gospels concerning the two great Sacraments of Baptism and the

Holy Eucharist. Each of the three Synoptists gives an account of the institution of the Holy Eucharist. But, though there are three records, it is of *one* occasion only; while S. John, who does not notice the institution, has preserved to us with considerable fulness our Lord's discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum, in which he deals with the doctrine of the Holy Communion. So far, then, as the Gospels are concerned, they tell us of two occasions, and two only, on which our Blessed Lord referred to the Holy Communion.

Similarly, we find the injunction to baptize associated with the Apostolic mission: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." [1]

This command is also noticed by S. Mark, although it is found among those last twelve verses of his Gospel, the authenticity of which is disputed. Both records evidently refer to the same occasion. And in the third chapter of S. John, in our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus, we have the clearest and most emphatic teaching in regard to the nature and necessity of Baptism.[2]

If, then, we confine ourselves to the Gospels,

[1] S. Matt. xxviii. 18–19. [2] Cf. S. John iii. 1–10.

our authority for Baptism and for the Holy Eucharist depends, in each case, on the record of our Lord's teaching on *two* occasions only. But, as we have seen, the Gospels tell us of *three different* occasions when our Lord referred in unmistakable terms to the power to forgive sin, which should be bestowed upon his apostles. So that the evidence for Absolution is stronger than for either Baptism or the Holy Communion; stronger, that is, in the greater number of occasions on which the doctrine of Absolution is taught; and in all three passages the wording is so emphatic, and the promise so definite, as to leave no way of escape.

It is true that Protestant commentators do not, as a rule, accept the Church's teaching on the subject. But, while they deny that our Lord meant what His words clearly affirm, they are not able to agree among themselves with respect to any explanation of what else the words could mean; for to say that a promise of such stupendous import is fulfilled by those preachers, whether priests or laymen, who by their sermons lead men to repentance, is too impotent an explanation to be worth considering; but it is practically the only one they offer.

Then, too, we must bear in mind that the Church is the interpreter of Holy Scripture; and that, until the rise of Protestantism in the sixteenth

century, the Church, with one consent, taught that this promise was fulfilled by the ministration of Absolution. And though Protestants have denied it, the Church has continued to teach the same in each of her separated communions. We find some variations in the method of the administration of Absolution. At first it was given by the bishop alone after public Confession; later, the Confession was heard by a penitentiary, who decided whether it should be made publicly or not; and where it seemed inadvisable for public Confession to be made, Absolution was given in private after private Confession; and gradually, with many developments, this became the practice of every part of the Church; and the reason for the change was, obviously, the avoidance of scandal.

In our own day there can, however, be no objection to any penitent making his Confession before the whole congregation, if he prefers the more ancient form of receiving Absolution; for Church history furnishes us with many instances of the imposition of public penance in the case of grievous sinners, long after it ceased to be the usual method of administering Absolution.

Again, we must remember that our Lord knew how His teaching on this subject would be understood by His Church; and it is quite inconceivable that He could have uttered words which He fore-

saw would be misunderstood by His *whole* Church. Besides, His promise that the Holy Spirit should guide the Church into all truth is quite inconsistent with the supposition that for sixteen centuries the Holy Ghost led the Church into error in regard to the meaning of His words about Absolution, and that it was reserved for certain Protestant schismatics in the sixteenth century to set the Church right, and to correct the teaching of the Holy Spirit for all those ages.

Whether the authority to forgive sins was committed to the apostles individually, and handed on by them through Apostolic succession, or whether it was bestowed upon the Church collectively, is quite immaterial; since we find our Church in her services claiming that that power has been given to her ministers. Until recently the former view was almost universal; but some great scholars, like Bishop Westcott, have lately given the weight of their authority to the latter opinion. This, however, is unimportant; for in either case we recognize that Almighty God has given power and authority to His Ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins. That this was recognized by the apostles themselves seems evident from S. Paul's words; for in his first Epistle to the Corinthians he excommunicates a man who

was living in mortal sin.[1] In the second Epistle he writes to say that he has absolved this man, and to tell the Corinthians to receive him back to their fellowship, using these words: "For if I have forgiven anything, to whom I have forgiven it, for your sakes have I forgiven it in the person of Christ." [2]

We may sum up this part of our argument by saying that the grace of penitence is as old as the world. It was the grace which enabled Adam to repent of his sin, and it worked in the soul of every penitent sinner under the Old Testament dispensation. But on Easter Day our Lord instituted the Sacrament of Penance; that is, He took the grace which had been working since the world began, and incorporated it in a visible sign, by which He communicates Absolution and the grace of penitence to those who use it. He did this in accordance with the Sacramental system of the Church, and in order that people might have something more than their own self-assurance on which to depend for their hope of the forgiveness of their sins.

From the testimony of Holy Scripture let us turn to the teaching of the Church, and we will begin with our own Prayer Book. We have already called attention to the fact that at the ordination of

[1] Cf. 1 Cor. v. 3–5. [2] 2 Cor. ii. 10.

a priest the bishop uses the same words that our Lord used to His apostles on Easter Day. And in saying, "Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the Imposition of our hands," adds, "Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained." And we have noticed that the Church requires every priest to remind his congregation twice a day, at Matins and Evensong, that Almighty God has given power, and commandment, to His Ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins. Further, we find that in the Exhortation in the Communion Office, after requiring communicants to examine their lives and conversations by the rule of God's commandments, and that not lightly, and after the manner of dissemblers with God, the Prayer Book adds that "because it is requisite, that no man should come to the Holy Communion, but with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience; therefore if there be any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned Minister of God's Word, and open his grief; that by the ministry of God's Holy Word he may receive the

benefit of Absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and the avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness." [1]

The order for the Visitation of the Sick is the only provision in the Prayer Book for a priest ministering to an individual soul, all the other services being of a public character. And in this there is the following rubric: "Here shall the sick person be moved to make a special Confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter. After which Confession, the Priest shall absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desire it) after this sort." Then follows the form of Absolution. "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of His great mercy forgive thee thine offences: And by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." [2]

If we turn from the testimony of our own Prayer Book to that of the Holy Catholic Church throughout the world, we find that *there is no part of it* in

[1] In the American Prayer Book the words "benefit of Absolution" are omitted, but the rest stands as in the English book.

[2] This is not in the American Office, but similar teaching is found in the Office for the "Visitation of Prisoners," in which the priest is directed to say to the prisoner, "Let no worldly consideration hinder you from making a true and full Confession

which Confession and Absolution is not the recognized means for the remission of mortal sin.

We all know that this is so in the Roman Church; but it is equally obligatory in the Eastern churches which have been long separated from Rome, and which repudiate Rome and its modern doctrinal additions quite as strongly as our own Communion does. This is the case not only with the Orthodox Greek Church but with the Abyssinian Church, and with the schismatical Eastern Communions. So that we can say absolutely that there is no part of the Church, which has preserved a valid ministry, and so is empowered to give Absolution, which does not teach this doctrine.

We are now in a position to give an answer to the question with which we began this chapter: Has God in Holy Scripture indicated any means by which I may obtain the assurance of His forgiveness? Does the Church, of which I am a member, point to any sacramental act by which I may secure this precious gift? I venture to assert that I have shown that such a means is indicated in the Gospels, with at least as much fulness as

of your sins"; after which follows the rubric, "Then shall the Minister examine whether he repent him truly of his sins, exhorting him to a particular Confession of the sin for which he is condemned. * * * After his Confession the priest shall declare to him the pardoning mercy of God, in the form which is used in the Communion Service."

in the cases of Baptism and the Holy Communion; and further that the whole Church, both East and West, points to a Sacrament, instituted by Christ Himself on Easter Day, by which the assurance of the forgiveness of sins may be secured. Our own Prayer Book, as we have seen, is most full and explicit on this point; and, while leaving individual members of her Communion quite free to use or to neglect this means of grace, she provides for every one who seeks it, what the whole Catholic Church has ever provided, a Sacrament by which we may receive the Absolution and Remission of our sins. In this she is at one with the Roman and Eastern Churches.

She differs from them, however, in refusing to make Confession and Absolution compulsory. In this I believe she is most wise; for compulsory Confession is attended by two serious dangers — that it may lead to sacrilegious Confession, to the keeping back of the truth about our sins, where persons are not really penitent; or even if the sins be sincerely confessed, that where there is no desire for Confession, the penitence may be so formal and perfunctory as to be wanting in such true sorrow for sin as is a necessary condition for forgiveness.

In conclusion let us briefly consider the effects of Absolution upon the penitent soul. First, it conveys the remission of sins; that is, the blotting

out of the guilt of sin, and therefore the restoring in us the life of grace, which is the result of our union with God through incorporation into Christ in Baptism. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of this in regard to our salvation. If we have committed but one mortal sin, the soul is thereby cut off from God, and deprived of grace. If we were to die in this state we should be lost; and there is no *revealed* means of grace whereby we can be re-united to God, and the guilt of our sin remitted, except by Confession and Absolution. I say no *revealed* means, because the Church has always held that where, from invincible ignorance or other causes, Absolution cannot be obtained, a perfect act of contrition is sufficient to secure God's pardon. But this is not a revealed means of forgiveness; it is only one which it is hoped may be efficacious where, through no fault of our own, Absolution cannot be obtained. If, however, we neglect to use this means of grace only because it is distasteful and humiliating, that in itself is a proof that our contrition is most imperfect, and this ought to fill us with serious doubts with respect to the forgiveness of our sins.

While the principal effect of Absolution is the remission of sins, this is by no means all the benefit we receive from it; for there is in this Sacrament an infusion of a special grace, the grace

of penitence, to make us truly sorry for our sins, and to give us a special strength to fight against them. Most persons who have used Confession will bear witness to the fact that not only is the burden of guilt removed from their soul, but a strange power is given them to resist and overcome temptations which, perhaps for many years, they constantly yielded to; and further, that, after Confession and Absolution, their sorrow for sin is greatly deepened, and their appreciation of the sinfulness of sin rendered far more intense.

Thirdly, Absolution restores to us the merits of our past life. By merits we mean those good works which become meritorious because done through the grace of Christ. Our Lord recognizes them when He exhorts us to lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven. Every good prayer, every sacrifice we have made, every duty performed for the love of God, every trial borne patiently, becomes a treasure laid up in heaven. By mortal sin we are cut off from God and heaven, and therefore forfeit this treasure. But by Absolution the bar to our union with God is removed, and the treasure is restored to us. We learn from the parable of the unmerciful servant that, when we fall back into mortal sin, old habits reassert their power over us, and claim us as their slave, and this we also know by bitter experience. This parable

therefore is but the converse of the teaching, that when by Absolution we are restored to God's favour, there is given back to us all the treasure which in our past life we had laid up in heaven.

Besides these three great effects of Absolution there are certain moral advantages in Confession itself, which we shall consider in the next chapter. Here we may pause to ask whether it is wise, whether it is safe, to neglect the use of the means of grace especially appointed by Christ Himself for the remission of sin, and enjoined and practised by the whole Catholic Church throughout the world in all its various branches. If we ask ourselves again the question, Are my sins forgiven, dare we put off, until we stand before the judgment seat of God, the answer to the question? Can we be satisfied to say, I *hope* so, when God has provided the means which, if we use them faithfully, will enable us to say, I *know* my sins are forgiven, for I have fulfilled the conditions upon which God has promised the forgiveness of sins?

CHAPTER IV

CONTRITION

We have endeavoured to show from Holy Scripture that God has appointed a means, instituted a Sacrament, by which we may obtain both the forgiveness of our sins and the assurance that we are forgiven, and through which we may further receive grace to resist sin in the future, and the restoration of our merits, of the treasure which we have laid up in heaven. We have pointed out also that our Church in its Prayer Book clearly draws attention to this Sacrament, asserting that God has given power and commandment, to His Ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins, and calling upon all who cannot quiet their own consciences to use this means of grace. We must now consider on what conditions we can obtain this Absolution. The conditions are three: Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction; that is, sorrow for sin, acknowledgment of sin, and reparation and amendment. Let us begin with Contrition.

What is Contrition? Sorrow for sin, but not

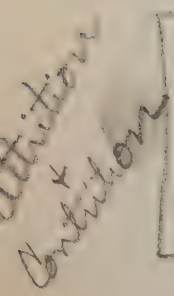
every sort of sorrow; for S. Paul, treating of repentance, points out that "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." [1] The sorrow of the world for sin is a selfish sorrow for the consequences of sin, a sorrow on account of what we have lost by our sin — the joy of our communion with God here, and the happiness of heaven hereafter; or it is a sorrow caused by the fear of punishment for our sin, — whether we regard the penal results of sin in this life (and they are many), or the eternal punishment of sin in hell in the world to come.

Contrition, the godly sorrow for sin, is an unselfish sorrow which flows in our souls, from the love of God, from the thought, not that we have lost heaven, not that we have merited hell, but that we have outraged God's love — God Who is so good to us, God Who is our Father in heaven; that by our sin we have crucified afresh our Lord Jesus Christ, treating His sufferings for us as though they had been nothing; and that by our sin we have grieved, perhaps quenched, the Holy Spirit in our souls.

It is not easy to stir up in our cold, selfish hearts real Contrition, the sorrow which springs from the love of God, and often we have to begin with an

[1] 2 Cor. vii. 10.

inferior sorrow which theologians call "Attrition," and which arises from fear rather than from love. In Attrition there must be at least a detestation of sin, and a resolve to sin no more; but it differs from Contrition in the motive of this detestation. Perfect Contrition flows, as we have seen, from love; Attrition from some other supernatural motive (supernatural in that it is apprehended by faith), such as the fear of the punishment or the loss which sin involves.



And yet we must not despise this inferior sorrow or Attrition; for it may be the beginning of something better. S. Augustine, in his commentary on the first Epistle of S. John, when treating of the words "Perfect love casteth out fear," remarks that fear is like the needle, and love like the thread which we use in sewing. The needle is necessary to puncture the material and make a way for the thread to follow; but the needle has to be drawn out in order that the thread may follow and remain in the material, and hold all the work together. Many a repentance, therefore, may begin with fear and end with love — the fear first piercing the hard heart with compunction, and the love flowing in afterwards and binding the soul to God.

As we read the lives of the saints we find that this has often been the case even in those who have afterwards attained to great holiness. It

was meditation on the awful results of sin in eternity which first made them turn their thoughts to God and to penitence, and then the Holy Spirit working in them enabled them so to repent from love of God, that this perfect love cast out the fear and united them to God in the bonds of divine charity.

It is not easy to obtain true Contrition, and we may well ask what we can do to gain it, what there is to help us to be sorry for our sins.

First, there is meditation on the love of God, His goodness manifested to us in our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of our life, His patience in having waited for us so long, His gracious Providence which has brought us within reach of the teaching of the Church and the means of grace. All our sins have been against God, from whom we have received nothing but goodness and mercy and love, and whom gratitude alone should constrain us to serve most faithfully.

Secondly, we may consider the malice of sin, its terrible results upon others, the happiness it has blighted, the health it has destroyed, the homes it has ruined; and then its effects upon ourselves, what it has done to injure, what it will do to destroy all that is good in us, if we do not repent.

Thirdly, and chiefly, we must meditate on the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and see there

what our sins did to Him Who so loved us that He died for us.

We must, however, carefully bear in mind that Contrition is not to be measured by emotional excitement; for this may be manifested in some temperaments where there is no real love of God, and no true sorrow for sin. We are taught by our Lord and His Apostles, and by the Church, that we are to judge of our religious state, not by our feelings, but by the fruits which we produce. Feelings may be accompaniments to Contrition, which beautify it, as the leaves beautify a tree; and they may help us to inhale, as it were, the goodness and love of God, as the leaves enable the tree to breathe in the carbon which it needs for its tissue. But our Lord in cursing the fig-tree [1] shows us that He seeks something more than leaves — that He demands fruit. On his way from Bethany to Jerusalem on Monday in Holy Week, He saw a fig-tree which attracted His attention by its leaves, and, seeking fruit but finding leaves only, He cursed it, and it withered away.

We must, therefore, look carefully for the signs of our Contrition, not in what we *feel* but in what we *do*. S. Paul gives the signs of repentance in the passage we have already quoted, saying, "For behold this selfsame thing that ye sorrowed after

[1] S. Mark xi. 13–14.

a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!" These are the signs of godly sorrow, that is, of Contrition. Let us examine them.

Four of these may be regarded as fruits offered to God as the immediate outcome of our Contrition; the other three are rather the effects of Contrition in our after life. The immediate results of our Contrition towards God are fear, vehement desire, indignation against sin, and a clearing of ourselves by Confession. We shall *fear* God with that solemn awe which a sinner must feel in the presence of the All Holy One. We shall have an intense *desire* for God, which is one of the marks of true penitence — "My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh also longeth after thee: in a barren and dry land where no water is." [1]

We shall experience deep *indignation* against sin when we consider that it is an outrage against God's love, a rebellion against His authority, and that it has crucified His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And we shall *clear* ourselves of our sins by sincere and penitent Confession of them. After this has been done there will remain in us a great *carefulness* in regard to our future life, manifesting itself

[1] Ps. lxiii. 2.

in *revenge* upon ourselves for our past sins — a willingness to mortify many lawful desires lest they should lead us again into danger, and as a means of punishing ourselves for the past. And we shall show our *carefulness* towards God by a greater diligence in His service, and, in order to make reparation for what we have done to offend Him, we shall strive by our *zeal* to win other souls to Him, and so to glorify Him.

Our Contrition will, however, not stop at this. It will manifest itself by certain definite fruits of penitence, the first of which will be a readiness to *confess* our sins. In the great parable of penitence, the parable of the Prodigal Son, the first sign that he had come to himself was a realization of his misery, and a determination at once to go to his father and confess his sin; for we read that "when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee." [1] A sorrow for sin which stops short of Confession is no true sorrow. The child that runs to its mother, and says, "I have done something very wrong, and I am very sorry, but I do not want to tell you what it is," is not really contrite, and does not deserve

[1] S. Luke xv. 17–18.

forgiveness. If we are sorry we shall have an intense desire to clear ourselves of our sin by a full acknowledgment of it. Our first determination will be to go to our Father and to make our Confession.

The next fruit of Contrition will be a resolution to *forsake* our sins, to forsake them absolutely and entirely. The prodigal did not go back to his evil life after he had made his confession. He remained in his father's house. A sorrow for sin, which contemplates a return to that sin in the future, is no penitence at all.

A third test of our Contrition, often the hardest but certainly one of the most important, is a determination to *keep out of the way of sin*, to give up occasions of sin, to break with people who have tempted us, to avoid circumstances which may lead us into temptation. It is very hard to give up a dear friend who has led us astray; but we cannot have real Contrition if we hesitate between a friend and God. We have indeed serious reason to doubt our penitence if we are saying to ourselves, "I will confess my sin, and forsake it, but I cannot give up the friend who tempted me; I will be very careful, and doubtless God will give me grace to resist the temptation in the future; but I cannot make the sacrifice involved in giving up

[1] S. Matt. vi. 15.

that friend." If that be so, we are simply deceiving ourselves about our Contrition; for, if we go deliberately back into temptation, we have no right to expect God to give us strength to resist it.

Then we must be ready to *forgive others* who have injured us; for our Lord has said, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses";[1] and every time we say the Lord's Prayer we say, "Forgive us our trespasses *as we forgive* those who trespass against us." This ought not to be really difficult. When we think how much God has forgiven us, and how grievously we have sinned against Him, it ought to be a satisfaction, almost a joy, to have something to forgive in others. If we are not ready to do this we are like the unmerciful servant who, after his lord had forgiven him ten thousand talents, seized his fellow-servant by the throat, and cast him into prison, because he could not pay the hundred pence which he owed him.[2]

Lastly, we must be ready to make *satisfaction* for our sins, first, to God, by bearing patiently and lovingly the consequences of our sins in this life, — sometimes in actual punishment, more often in the weakness which sin has produced in our will, and in the return of the old temptations to worry and distress us. We must regard these as part

[1] S. Matt. vi. 15. [2] Cf. S. Matt. xviii. 23–35.

of the penance due to our sins. Then, besides, we must render satisfaction to man by making restitution (if it be possible) where we have in any way wronged our neighbour.

If upon examination we find that we have all these signs of Contrition, we ought to feel very happy; for it is a proof that we have the love of God in our hearts, and this alone ensures the forgiveness of our sins. But if any one of these signs is wanting, it shows that our Contrition is imperfect and we should pray to God to help us to acquire that fruit of Contrition which is lacking in us, and we should never rest satisfied until we have obtained it.

CHAPTER V

CONFESSION

The second condition required for Absolution is Confession. As we have already indicated, it is the first fruit of Contrition; so that it is impossible to be truly sorry for our sins without having a great desire to confess them. That it is an essential condition for forgiveness may be inferred from S. John's words: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." [1] S. John first warns us against the danger of self-deception, and then implies that it may be avoided by Confession, and further asserts emphatically that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If, however, we do not confess our sins, there is no reason to suppose that God will forgive us or cleanse us. It is hardly necessary in this place to multiply texts bearing upon Confession; they are

[1] 1 S. John i. 8–9.

very numerous; but the one we have quoted fairly sums up and expresses their teaching.

We may observe, before we pass to the consideration of Confession itself, that our Prayer Book is very clear in regard to its necessity. In the Sentences to be said at the beginning of Morning and Evening Prayer we find the text we have just quoted. It is immediately followed by an exhortation on the importance of Confession, in these words: "Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness; and that we should not dissemble nor cloke them before the face of Almighty God our Heavenly Father; but confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart; to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same, by His infinite goodness and mercy." In the Communion service we are told that if a person cannot quiet his own conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel, or needs the benefit of Absolution, he is first to "open his grief" to some Minister of God's Word. And, as we have already pointed out, in the Order for the Visitation of the Sick the priest is directed to *move* the sick person to make a special confession of his sins, and it is only after that confession that he is to absolve him. Our Church is, therefore, very clear in its teaching that Confession is a necessary condition for receiving Absolution.

But what do we mean by Confession? Confession is acknowledging our sins to God. All people are agreed thus far about Confession *to God;* but very few make their Confessions to God. Confession is not acknowledging our *sinfulness* to God. It is not saying in a general way that we have erred and strayed from His ways, that we have broken His commandments; for this is merely confessing that we are human, and therefore sinful. Confession is telling our sins, in thought, in word, and in deed, our *definite* sins, to God; and very few persons do this, partly because they do not take the trouble to find out what their sins are, partly, perhaps, because they think that God knows them already. Sometimes when we have committed a very grievous sin it worries us, and we are quite ready and desirous to confess *that* sin to God. But it is not enough to confess one sin without confessing all our sins, at least all that we know and remember after careful self-examination; for God does not forgive one sin without forgiving all our sins.

Very few persons, however, practice *careful* self-examination who do not also practice Confession to a priest. There are many who say they do not go to Confession to a priest because they can confess their sins just as well to God alone (although, perhaps, they forget to add that they cannot obtain Absolution in this way). They are very much like

those persons who say they do not go to church because they can say their prayers and read their Bible just as well at home. We know that these are generally the people who do not say their prayers or read their Bible *at all*. So, too, those who are most loud in their protestations that they believe in Confession to God alone are very often those who do not make Confession to God at all, because they have very little idea of what Confession to God involves; for Confession to God certainly requires a particular knowledge of the sins which we have to confess, and a real sorrow for them, a true contrition; and few people who do not use Sacramental Confession make much progress in self-examination, self-knowledge, or contrition.

In confessing our sins to a priest, however, we do confess them to God, as the form of the Confession shows: "I confess to God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, before the whole Company of Heaven, and to you, my father, that I have sinned." We confess to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, before the Company of Heaven, in whose sight we committed our sin, and in the presence of the priest who is God's representative, a man like ourselves, but commissioned by God to pronounce the authoritative absolution of our sins, if we confess them and are penitent.

The Bible is full of instances of Confession to

man; for example, when Achan was convicted of his sin Joshua said to him, "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make *confession* unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done." [1] Here we observe that the form is similar to the one used in the Church: "Make confession unto the Lord God of Israel, and tell *me*." And this confession was not made to Joshua with any idea of escaping the temporal punishment of his sin; for Achan knew that he must die. It was for the saving of his soul.

So, again, when Nathan spoke to David the parable of the ewe lamb, and afterwards applied it to David's own sin, David said unto Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." [2] David confessed his sin to Nathan, and Nathan by God's authority absolved him from his sin, but pronounced as the penance that his child should die, and that the sword should not depart from his house.

Confession, indeed, is part of the Mosaic law; for we read in the Book of Leviticus, after a catalogue of sins, that "it shall be, when he shall be

[1] Josh. vii. 19–20. [2] 2 Sam. xii. 13.

guilty in one of these things, that he shall *confess* that he hath sinned in that thing: . . . and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin."[1] And again in the Book of Numbers, "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the Lord, and that person be guilty; then they shall *confess* their sin which they have done."[2] The atonement which the priest made was the sacrifice offered, and, as each class of sin had its own sacrifice, it was necessary that the priest should know what the sin was in order that he might make the atonement; just as in the Christian Church it is necessary that the priest should know what a man's sin is in order that he may absolve it; for he cannot absolve what he does not know.

If we pass from the Old to the New Testament we find the same teaching about Confession; for we are told that when S. John the Baptist preached repentance, "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, *confessing* their sins."[3]

As the confession of sin was part of the Jewish law, our Blessed Lord must have often seen men making their confessions in the temple, and if it had

[1] Lev. v. 5–6. [2] Num. v. 5–7. [3] S. Matt. iii. 5–6.

been one of those things in Judaism which was to be abrogated by Christianity, surely He would have said so. But there is not only not one word from His lips to this effect in the Gospels, not one word in the other books of the New Testament, and there are many passages which imply that this law of Confession was still in force in the Christian Church; for example, when S. Paul was preaching at Ephesus, we read that "many that believed came, and *confessed*, and shewed their deeds." [1] The context shows that the Confession evidently was made to S. Paul, and probably publicly.

We have certainly said enough to show that Confession is the plain teaching of both the Old and New Testaments and of our Prayer Book, and not only Confession to God alone, but Confession to God in the presence of His representative.

If I were to say that all people believe in Confession to *man* as well as to God, there are many probably who would challenge my statement; and yet I think I can prove that it is true. When a man has committed murder, and has been tried and found guilty, the sentiment of society demands that he should confess his sin before he is executed. And if the man goes to his death without this Confession, many people would say that he cannot be penitent, and so are doubtful of his salvation. But if Con-

[1] Acts xix. 18.

fession to God alone is *sufficient*, and Confession to man is *wrong*, why should the murderer confess his sin? Some may reply, Because his sin is a sin against society, and he owes it to society to confess it. But every one of our own sins is a sin against society, that great society to which we belong, Christ's Body, the Church. If we sin we sin against every member of that Body; for, as S. Paul says, "whether one member suffer, all members suffer with it";[1] and we owe it to that Body, to that society, to make our Confession. In the early ages of Christianity this was publicly made before the whole Church; afterwards before a priest as the representative of the Church. So that when we make our Confession to a priest we make it to God, to God's representative, and to the representative of the society against which we sinned, the Church.

Again, if any one has wronged us, as in the case of a servant who has stolen from us, we often make confession of the theft the condition of our forgiveness. But why should we do so if Confession to God alone is sufficient, and we consider that Confession to man is unnecessary, perhaps harmful?

Yet, once more, with our children, do we not bring them up to confess their faults to us? Should we ever think of saying to a child who came to us, full of sorrow, to confess some grievous fault, "My

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 26.

child, what you have done is probably very wrong, but do not tell me what it is, because that would be still more wrong; for it would be making your confession to man, and you ought to make your confession to God alone"? We know that a parent would not act thus, but would rather encourage such a confession.

I think these three examples, taken from many, are sufficient to prove my assertion that every one believes in Confession to man. The only real point of difference is that some think this Confession only necessary for *other* people, while others, with a greater sense of justice and humility, feel that it is necessary also for themselves.

Having thus shown the universality of the belief in Confession to man, let us proceed to consider what are the benefits of such Confession.

There is, first, the benefit of *sympathy*. And what a wonderful power sympathy is! It is one of God's good gifts to us in this world of sorrow; for it enables us to share one another's burdens instead of having to bear them always alone. And perhaps there is no occasion on which we feel more deeply the power of sympathy than in our first Confession. It seemed so hard, so impossible; and yet, when we began to make our Confession, we experienced far less difficulty than we expected, and the reason was the sympathy of the priest.

And when a sin has been confessed, what a weight is taken off our soul! We feel that we have some one else to help us to bear the burden, and his sympathy inspires us with hope for better things, and changes the whole prospect of our life from gloom to brightness. We are told in S. Luke that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," [1] and this joy must be in a measure caused by their sympathy with us. So there is something angelic in the sympathy of the priest for the penitent, sympathy with the struggles and falls, still more with the desire to rise again and redeem the past.

Another benefit of Confession is that it is the greatest of helps to *self-knowledge*. Self-knowledge is a very important acquisition, so important that even the heathen recognized its value, and one of them, Solon, expressed it in the motto, "Know thyself." Ruskin has felicitously added, "Know thyself, for through thyself only thou canst know God." And yet few things are more difficult to acquire than real self-knowledge, and probably very few do acquire it, except those who earnestly seek in prayer the help of the Holy Spirit, and diligently practice self-examination. But self-examination without Confession is generally very unreal. It is like preparing a speech which we know is never to be

[1] S. Luke xv. 10.

delivered, and into the preparation of which we therefore do not throw ourselves earnestly.

All those who have ever used Confession bear testimony to its power in deepening self-knowledge. We come to see ourselves in a clearer light, more as God sees us. The excuses and extenuations, which so often prevent us from realizing our sins, can have no place in Confession, and we see our sins in all their naked ugliness. Then, too, our greater self-knowledge enables us to test our spiritual progress, to see whether we are going forward or slipping back, whether faults are gradually being conquered or becoming more frequent. We learn not only to know ourselves, but to know better where we stand in spiritual life.

A third advantage of Confession is that it is very *humiliating*. There are many people who for this reason say, "I could never make my Confession to a man; it would be too humiliating." It is true that it does humble us very much. But then we must ask, Is pride a virtue or a deadly sin? And did not our Lord say that "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted"?[1] He did not say that he who is humbled by somebody else should be exalted, but "he that humbleth himself." And in what way can we do this so effectually or so justly as in Confession? Humility is the foundation of all Christian virtues;

[1] S. Luke xiv. 11.

and if we are too proud to make our Confession there must be something very wrong in the fundamental principal of our spiritual life.

Again, Confession *deepens our sorrow* for sin, and so is a great help to Contrition; and Contrition, as we have already shown, is one of the most blessed experiences of the soul. A broken and contrite heart God will not despise;[1] and sometimes Confession transforms the imperfect sorrow, with which we approach the Sacrament of Penance, into true Contrition. Many whose hearts were cold, and who had little feeling of sorrow, when they came to make their Confession found the flood-gates unlocked, and tears of true sorrow flowing freely.

Lastly, in Confession we get good advice concerning our practical struggle with sin; and there is probably nothing in our life concerning which we so greatly need advice as how to conquer our sins. When we are in doubt in the matters of daily life we seek the advice of some friend in whose judgment we have confidence. How much more should we do so in those matters which concern our eternal salvation.

It is just possible, however, that some would say, Why should I go to a priest for Confession? Why should I not choose some pious friend whose sympathy may comfort me, and whose advice may help

[1] Cf. Ps. li. 17.

me? I should reply that in so important and delicate a matter it is well to go to one who has had experience, who has made a study of the difficulties of the soul. It is a priest's "business" to advise in the concerns of the spiritual life, and the struggle against sin; just as it is the business of a doctor to advise us in regard to the diseases of our body, and that of a lawyer to advise us in regard to the difficulties which arise concerning our worldly estate. There is an old saying that "a man who is his own lawyer has a fool for his client," and this is probably still more true of a man who is his own director.

Moreover, if we were in great pain we should not go to some trusted friend, of whose goodness we were convinced, and ask him to prescribe for us; but we should go to a doctor in whose skill we had faith. So, in the ailments of the soul, we should not merely go to some good friend who has never made such things a study, and has had no experience in regard to them, but to a priest whose work it is to deal with souls, and who, in addition to having studied their difficulties carefully, has the promise of the special guidance of God's Holy Spirit, which is given to the priesthood; for even in the Old Testament we are told that "the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts."[1]

[1] Mal. ii. 7.

There is, however, another reason why we should go to a priest to make our Confession: Because he represents the Church, the Body of Christ, which we have injured by our sins, and to which, therefore, we need to make Confession. Moreover, he also represents God, whose nature and property is ever to have mercy and to forgive, and who has given power and commandment to His priests to absolve those who are penitent.

Yet another advantage of making our Confession to a priest is that he is bound to secrecy under peril of mortal sin, and under the gravest ecclesiastical penalty. According to Canon 113 of the Canons of the English Church, promulgated in 1603, the penalty of any breach of the seal of Confession is "irregularity"; that is, disability to exercise the priestly office. If we go to a friend to get his advice in regard to our sins, he is of course bound in honour not to talk about what we have said. But it is certainly much safer to go to a priest who is bound by the most sacred of obligations, the sacramental seal of Confession.

The great reason, however, why we should make our Confessions to a priest is, as we have already indicated, in order that we may obtain Absolution; for to *no one else* did Christ give the power to remit sin when He said, as He breathed on His apostles, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye

remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." [1] And these words, which in our Church constitute part of the "form" of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, are said to every priest at the moment of his ordination.

Why did Christ say these words, and why has the Church perpetuated them? Surely not, as some think, as an interesting verse of the Bible, or a curious relic of antiquity retained in the Prayer Book; but in order that men may use the power they convey for the remission of their sins.

[1] S. John xx. 22–23.

CHAPTER VI

SATISFACTION

The third condition required for Absolution is Satisfaction. All penitence, as we have said, is summed up in Contrition. Confession and Satisfaction are only its fruits or results; but where we find that they are wanting it is a sign that our Contrition is imperfect.

What is Satisfaction? And can we make any Satisfaction to God for our sins? It is most true that on the Cross our Lord Jesus Christ, because He was both God and Man, through the infinite dignity of His Person, was able to offer to God a full and perfect Satisfaction for our sins; and we cannot too strongly assert that this is true of Him alone. But Christ, having satisfied the justice of God superabundantly for the sin of man, was able to apply to us this satisfaction in two ways: either by granting entire remission, without letting any penalty remain, or, on the other hand, by commuting a greater into a lesser penalty, that is, eternal into temporal punishment. The first He employs in Baptism, wherein He remits not only the sin but

also all punishment, both temporal and eternal, due to that sin; and this is because sins committed before Baptism were not sins against grace. The second He uses in the case of those who fall back into sin after Baptism, being, as it were, constrained for their own good to visit them with some temporal punishment, although by Absolution the eternal punishment due to mortal sin is remitted. We must not from this infer that our Lord failed to make entire Satisfaction for us; but, on the contrary, that having acquired an absolute right over us, by the infinite price He paid for our salvation, He grants us pardon on the conditions and under the laws which seem good to Him.

Now Scripture proves that God inflicts temporal punishment for pardoned sin. Moses obtained pardon for the murmuring Israelites, yet they were nearly all punished with death.[1] Again, we find that after David had acknowledged his crime, Nathan said to him, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die."[2] And this was only a part of David's penance; for he was to be humiliated by his son Absalom, and the sword was never to depart from his house.

[1] Cf. Num. xiv. 20–24. [2] 2 Sam. xii. 13–14.

When, therefore, we speak of making Satisfaction, we do not mean that anything we can do *of ourselves* can possibly make Satisfaction to the justice of God. Our Lord made this Satisfaction for us once for all; but, as members of His body, we are called to share in some small degree in that work of Satisfaction. Our Lord bore the Cross for us; and yet He has told us that unless we take up our cross daily and follow Him we cannot be His disciples. Our Lord now in Heaven "ever liveth to make intercession" for us;[1] and yet He has told us to pray, and taught us that on our prayer must depend very largely the gifts and blessings which we need. As, then, we have to share in His work of intercession, and yet He is our only Mediator, so we are to make Satisfaction for our sins, although He made "a full, perfect, and sufficient . . . satisfaction for the sins of the whole world."

We may look upon our work of Satisfaction as twofold: First, that which as members of Christ we make for the sins of the Church; for S. Paul writes to the Colossians, "I . . . rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body's sake, which is the Church."[2] And, secondly, that temporal penance for post-baptismal sin which God sees fit

[1] Heb. vii. 25. [2] Col. i. 24.

to inflict upon us for our own good, and for the satisfaction of His justice.

Two effects follow upon every mortal sin committed against grace (that is, after Baptism): guilt and punishment. The guilt is remitted through Absolution, when the soul is cleansed from all sin by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ; and the eternal punishment due to sin is also then remitted. But a certain amount of punishment, varying according to God's will, and called the temporal punishment of sin, is left to be borne by the penitent sinner either in this world or in the Intermediate State. The debt of this temporal punishment can be paid, however, much more readily in this life than hereafter, because here we can merit, and in the Intermediate State we cannot merit. For here we can do good works, and endure evil voluntarily, and the essential value of our offering depends upon its being a voluntary one. In the Intermediate State the wills of those who are saved are absolutely conformed to God's will; and they are confirmed in grace. Since, therefore, there can be no further temptation, and no possibility of choice or of sin, suffering there cannot be meritorious like that which we willingly endure in this life.

The penance which is imposed by the priest in the Sacrament of Penance is, of course, only a part of the Satisfaction which we have to make, the real

penance being sent us by God in the crosses and pains, the disciplines and difficulties of our life. The penance which a priest gives is frequently *remedial;* that is, it helps us to overcome sins which have been confessed; and it is a test of our obedience to the laws of God and of His Church, our sins, of course, having all been the result of disobedience.

As this book is intended primarily for those who have not been to Confession, it may be well to say that the sort of penances given are generally acts of devotion, such as the recitation of prayers, the saying of certain Psalms, the reading or making of meditations on portions of Scripture, — all intended to be helpful, either in bringing to the penitent a greater sense of the evil of his sin, or else in showing him how he may overcome it.

We shall, however, perhaps get a more practical view of Satisfaction if we examine some of the elements which go to make up our conception of it. The most prominent among these is the idea of *amendment*, both positive and negative. No penitence can be of any value which does not involve real amendment, not only the negative abandonment of sin, but the positive doing of duties which we have left undone. It is not enough to determine that we will not again fall into some grievous sin which we have confessed, if we are purposing to leave undone many positive duties of Christian

life. Christian life must be the imitation, though imperfect, of Christ's life. In His life, however, there was no sin. Therefore it is quite evident that Christian life cannot be merely abstinence from sin. It must be the doing those duties which our Lord taught by precept and example, duties to God and man, to our neighbour and to ourselves. And no amendment can be regarded as adequate which stops short of the attempt at least to do these.

The next element of Satisfaction to be considered is *restitution*. This is an absolutely essential part of Satisfaction; for though God has committed great powers to His Church, not even the Church can remit the duty of restitution where the sinner has it in his power to make it. By restitution we mean not only restoring goods of which we have robbed another, for with many of us stealing probably has not been one of our sins, but restoring the good name of which we have robbed a person by scandal or gossip or perhaps even malicious untruth, and apologizing for wrongs done or injuries inflicted — in a word, by endeavouring, so far as we are able, to undo or make reparation for all wrongs done to our neighbour.

A third element of Satisfaction is *penance*, not only the performing carefully the penance imposed by the priest at the time of our Confession, but also the bearing patiently the pains and sufferings and

temptations which are the temporal punishment of our sins. This is a very important matter, and deserves careful consideration. After the guilt of sin has been forgiven there are consequences left as punishments, which we must bear patiently, recognizing their justice, and lovingly, because we know they are intended for our good.

We find this symbolized in two of our Lord's miracles: the healing of the sick of the palsy, when Christ said to the sick man, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house";[1] and the healing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, when He said unto him, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk."[2] For many a weary year the bed had carried the sick man. Now for a short time he was to carry the bed. For many a year, perhaps, our sins have carried us wherever they would. After they are absolved we have to carry the consequences of our sins, sometimes in the weakness which they have left, sometimes in the temptations to which they have rendered us liable.

Sin wounds the memory, and especially certain kinds of sin. That wound in the memory may lead to frequent returns of temptation which we must meet bravely, and bear patiently as part of the penance of our sin. There are occasions when the consequences of sin bring humiliation upon us,

[1] S. Matt. ix. 6. [2] S. John v. 8.

or temporal loss, such as poverty or ill-health. In such cases we must remember that God allows these punishments to befall us in this world, partly as a discipline to strengthen us, and partly that we may not have to bear greater sufferings in the Intermediate State. In the miracle of the healing of the impotent man at Bethesda, the carrying of his bed on the Sabbath day was the cause of humiliating criticisms on the part of his neighbours that he was breaking the Sabbath. So the result of our sins, when we are trying to overcome them, may bring upon us the criticisms of those who feel that our amendment of life is a reproach to them. This also we must bear patiently and humbly.

The last element of Satisfaction on which we shall touch is *reparation*. If we are truly penitent we shall desire to do something to show God our penitence. Restitution requires us to make reparation to those of our neighbours whom we have wronged. But surely we shall try to find something by which we can make reparation for the wrong that we have done to God, and inasmuch as by our sins we have dishonoured Him, we should try to find something by which to add to His accidental glory. Under this head would come:

1. Works of mercy — labouring for the poor and sick and ignorant and sinful.

2. Special offerings made for the work of the Church.

3. Great zeal in helping other souls, and especially in trying to bring sinners to repentance. It has been truly said that probably no one ever came to God in penitence alone; that is, no one ever repented, and so learned the blessing of God's pardon, without being the means of leading some other soul to experience the same blessing.

4. We shall have a very great horror and detestation of sin, both in ourselves and in others. As the Psalmist says, "Mine eyes gush out with water: because men keep not thy law." [1]

[1] Ps. cxix. 136.

CHAPTER VII

HOW TO MAKE A GOOD CONFESSION

As this little book has been written chiefly for those who have not used Confession, a chapter on the method of making a Confession may be helpful to many.

The first step in your preparation must, of course, be a careful self-examination to enable you to find out the sins of your life which you have to confess. This self-examination should be begun with earnest prayers for the help of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is not only to show you what your sins have been, but to make you feel how great they are. You must earnestly pray Him to give you light to see your sins, and, more than this, grace to sorrow for them with that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance."

In preparing for your first Confession it is well to divide your life into periods, and to examine yourself by each period separately: your childhood, your school-days, the different places where you have lived. You should try also to recall scenes and companions; for they will often help you to remember sins. And then, invoking God's Holy Spirit,

you should go through questions on the Commandments, asking yourself in regard to them and under each period of your life: "Have I ever committed this sin, and if so, how often? Has it been sufficently often to become a habit? and if a habit, when did it begin, when did it end, or is it still going on in my life?" Then further ask yourself, "Have there been any aggravations of this sin? Was it ever done specially against the voice of conscience, or after solemn resolutions to give it up, or immediately after Communion?"

It will be well in this work to use questions upon the Ten Commandments or upon the Seven Deadly Sins. Such questions are not supplied here, because they may be found in many books of devotion.[1] In your self-examination it is well not to do too much at one time. Each sin that you discover should be written down on paper. It is not necessary to write it out in full, but put down a few words, sufficient to recall it to your memory; and when you have been over your whole life with these questions, and have written down what you have found in your self-examination, kneel down and read it over in the presence of God. Is it not terrible? Think of

[1] The author ventures to refer to his little pamphlet "The Way of Penitence," which contains very full self-examination questions for a first Confession, compiled from several of the best known manuals, and published by Longmans, Green, & Co.

yourself as looking over the page in the Book of Judgment, on which the Recording Angel has written down your life, and, as you read it, realize that for one mortal sin you have deserved to forfeit Heaven, and have merited Hell. Then begin humbly to ask God's pardon for these sins; ask especially for the gift of Contrition, and say many short prayers in your own words. Read over on your knees the fifty-first and the one hundred and thirtieth Psalms, which are the great Psalms of penitence.

In preparing your Confession you should distinguish between sins which are *mortal* and sins which are *venial*. All sins are not mortal; for S. John tells us that there is "sin unto death" and "sin not unto death." [1] Mortal sin is so called because it cuts the soul off from grace, and so separates us from God. While we are in mortal sin we cannot please God; we are in a state of guilt, and if we should die in this state we should be lost. The characteristics of mortal sin are three: (1) There must be "weighty matter"; (2) Consciousness of guilt; and (3) Consent of the will.

1. "Weighty matter" is the term used in the Order for the Visitation of the Sick. Most Protestant sects refuse to recognize any difference in sin, and represent all sins as equal. But surely our moral sense cannot admit this; for it would require

[1] 1 S. John v. 16–17.

the anger of a little child to be as great an act of sin as the violence of a man who commits murder, since both are breaches of the Sixth Commandment. However, S. John tells us clearly that while "all unrighteousness is sin," there is "sin not unto death" as well as "sin unto death"; so that considered *per se*, the difference between mortal and venial sin is to be found in the gravity of the act itself.

2. Then, too, for a sin to be mortal it must not only have weighty matter, but there must be a consciousness of guilt. At the time the sin was committed you must have known that you were doing wrong; for no sin committed in ignorance can be mortal.

3. Lastly, to make a sin mortal there must be consent of the will. So that an act of sin, however grievous in itself, if done unintentionally, cannot be mortal. For instance, if a man, who is driving, accidentally runs over and kills a child, though the death of the child is weighty matter, the sin is not mortal, because there was no intention to do it.

It is to be hoped that in your self-examination you will find but few mortal sins. The greater number of our sins are venial; but we must not therefore think that they are of no consequence in God's sight. The word venial means "pardonable," and is applied to such sins as do not possess the characteristics of

mortal sin; that is, to such as may be found in souls that are united to God, and in a state of grace, loving God and desiring to obey Him. Nor are venial sins merely temptations to sin, as some people think. For temptations to sin are not sin at all; indeed, if resisted, they enable us to acquire merit and many other good things.

Venial sins are rather those sins of infirmity or surprise into which every one at times is apt to fall. They do not necessarily require the grace of Absolution, but can be remitted through prayer and acts of Contrition. As S. John says, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death." [1] Venial sin, however, greatly hinders the progress of the soul, and grieves the Holy Spirit.

Again, in your self-examination you must not be content merely to look for sins of *commission*, but also for sins of *omission*. Duties omitted are in God's sight as much sins as actual transgressions of the Commandments; indeed, our Lord's teaching in His parables seems to show that sometimes they are worse. The man with one pound, the man with the one talent, the five foolish virgins, and those at the left hand in the parable of the sheep and goats, were all among the lost, and yet not for the commis-

[1] 1 S. John v. 16.

sion of any actual sin.[1] In every case it was for the omission of some duty.

God did not create you, and endow you with all your splendid gifts of body, mind, and soul, merely that you might do no harm, but that you might do good; and if your life has been a wasted life, in God's sight it has been a sinful life. Therefore, in your examination be careful not to pass over duties which have been neglected, duties both to God and your neighbour, duties of prayer and work, and acts of charity.

As we have already indicated, you should mention in your Confession whether a sin is habitual or only occasional; and if it be a habit, how long it has continued, how often it has been broken off, and whether it still has a hold upon you.

Lastly, we must remember that all sin can be committed in three ways: in *thought*, *word*, and *deed*. Some people suppose that they are not responsible for sins of thought, or at least that sins of thought which are not carried out into action are not sins at all. Nothing can be more untrue; for our Blessed Lord, in giving that terrible list of sins in the fifteenth chapter of S. Matthew, puts "evil thoughts" at the very head of the list: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications,

[1] Cf. S. Luke xix. 22; S. Matt. xxv. 26; xxv. 12; xxv. 41–46.

thefts, false witness, blasphemies." [1] And again, in the Sermon on the Mount, He shows that the Sixth and Seventh Commandments can be broken in thought and feeling as well as in act;[2] and in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in the Temple, He points out that it is possible to commit mortal sin in thought; for the Pharisee had lived a most exemplary life in respect to the external observance of the law, but he was not "justified" because of a sin of thought — pride.[3]

You must distinguish between *sins* of thought and *temptations* of thought. These latter only become sins when they have been consented to. The devil may have power to suggest to us a train of thought which tends in a wrong direction, and such thoughts may be in our minds for some minutes without our being conscious that they are wrong. If we put them away the moment that conscience tells us they are wrong, there is no sin. If, however, after conscience has spoken, we go on with the train of thought because it is pleasant, then we commit sin in thought.

It is scarcely necessary to say more about sins of word than to remind you of our Blessed Lord's warning: "That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." [4] We need often to pray with the

[1] S. Matt. xv. 19.
[2] Cf. S. Matt. v. 22, 28.
[3] S. Luke xviii. 10–15.
[4] S. Matt. xii. 36.

Psalmist, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth: and keep the door of my lips." [1]

In the case of the more serious sins of your life, your besetting sins, or sins which have become a habit with you, it is sometimes helpful to trace them to their source, and in your Confession to mention how they began.

It is well to keep in mind three things in Confession. You are required (1) to tell all your sins, (2) to give some idea of the number of times the sin was committed, and at least to say whether it was occasional or habitual, and (3) to say whether it was aggravated by any circumstances. You should always avoid mentioning the *name* of any other person in your Confession, or of alluding to their sins excepting in so far as they may be inferred from your own sin.

Having made your self-examination, and so prepared your Confession, you should make an appointment with the priest you have selected to hear your Confession. For a first Confession it is better to make a special appointment, and not to go at an hour when ordinary Confessions are heard, because the first Confession, of course, requires more time than ordinary Confessions, and the priest should have ample time at his disposal to help you with his sympathy and advice. This appointment may be made by letter, for it is not at all necessary to see

[1] Ps. cxli. 3.

the priest before you make your Confession; indeed, it is often expedient not to do so. He can help you better after he has heard your Confession. Before that he can at most only say some general words of encouragement, which ought not to be necessary. In choosing the priest to whom you will go, it is best to select one whom you know to have had experience in hearing Confessions, and in whose judgment you have, therefore, confidence.

On the day appointed go to the church sometime before the hour named, and spend that time in prayer. When the priest is ready he will show you where to kneel to make your Confession, and will first give you a blessing or say a prayer, after which you begin by saying:

"In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

"I confess to God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, before the whole company of Heaven, and to you, my father, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed, of my fault, of my own fault, of my own great fault; especially I confess that I have committed these sins."

Then confess as simply as possible the sins which you have noted down on your self-examination paper (which you should bring with you); and when you have come to the end of your list of sins, finish the form of Confession in these words:

"For these, and all my other sins which I cannot now remember, I am heartily sorry; I firmly purpose amendment; I most humbly ask pardon of God; and of you, my father, I beg for penance, counsel, and Absolution. Wherefore I pray God Almighty to have mercy upon me and to forgive me, and you, my father, to pray for me to the Lord our God. Amen."

During your Confession the priest will ask you some questions about any point which he does not quite understand. Always answer quite simply and clearly. It may be, too, that there are some things which you have noted down in regard to which you are not sure whether they are sins or not. In that case you should ask the priest whether they are sins, telling him that you are doubtful about them. Or, there may be some which you do not know how to confess. Tell the priest that this is so, and he will help you.

After you have finished the list of your sins, you can ask for counsel upon any point on which you need advice. Always try to be very definite, and to confine your questions strictly to spiritual matters connected with your own soul. If you need counsel or explanation as regards doctrinal or ceremonial matters, do not bring these into your Confession, but ask to see the priest some other time, that he may instruct you in these matters.

In your Confession you ask for penance, counsel, and Absolution. We have said much about penance and Absolution. In regard to counsel, remember that no one can be more able to advise you than the priest to whom you make your Confession, not only from his training in the spiritual life, but because no one else knows as he does the circumstances of your sins, and because you may well believe that God will guide him specially in the advice he gives.

You need to come to your Confession with great sorrow for your sins; with faith in the power of the Blood of Christ to cleanse you from all sin; and with entire sincerity, desiring to tell all your sins; for to be insincere is to be sacrilegious, since it is lying, not unto man, but unto God the Holy Ghost, as Ananias and Sapphira did.[1] But you must also have a firm purpose of amendment of life; for without this there can be no true penitence. And you must come with hope of pardon. This last was what the Confession of Judas Iscariot lacked. It was full and entire; but he had no hope that he could be forgiven. You must come not only hoping but *believing* in God's promise that "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."[2]

After your Confession you should make a most earnest and careful thanksgiving for the inestimable

[1] Cf. Acts v. 3. [2] Is. i. 18.

blessing you have received. Try to realize that to obtain your Absolution God was made man, lived on earth, and died on the Cross. The Te Deum, the Magnificat, and some of the Psalms (especially Psalms 30, 32, 40, 103, and 107) supply excellent material for thanksgiving.

You should make your Communion as soon after your Confession as practicable. You will probably be happier than you have ever been in your life; indeed, the testimony of most earnest souls after their first Confession is that their happiness is like a foretaste of Heaven; for it is the happiness of union with God, and of the consciousness of His love.

CHAPTER VIII

OBJECTIONS TO ABSOLUTION

THERE remains for us, in our concluding chapters, to consider and to meet the principal objections which are brought against Confession and Absolution. And we shall begin with those against Absolution, because this logically comes first, though not in order of time; since Confession precedes Absolution, as its necessary condition. But the real question which this little book has attempted to deal with is not so much whether Confession is beneficial, as whether God has provided a means by which sin may be *absolved;* for, if He has, the conditions upon which we may obtain absolution become only of secondary importance.

The first objection to Absolution is put forth by those who deny that God has provided any sacramental means by which sin may be forgiven, and who teach that the sinner can obtain the forgiveness of his sins from God directly (as the Prodigal Son did from his father), and without any intervention of or assistance from the Church; that, indeed, the only thing needed is that he should desire to be forgiven.

Those who hold this view, to be logical, have to reject the *efficacy* alike of Baptism and the Holy Communion, and most of them do reject it, at least thus far, that they hold Baptism to be a mere outward sign of admission into Church privileges, a sign which conveys no special grace; while they regard the Holy Communion only as a memorial of Christ's death.

The special grace of Baptism is regeneration. This, however, these make to depend not upon Baptism but upon conversion. So that, according to their view, it requires no objective act, but follows on a subjective change in the sinner's soul. The Church, however, teaches that regeneration and conversion are absolutely different things; that regeneration is the result of the Sacrament of Baptism, and can take place but once in a man's life, since a man can only be born once; and that while conversion is indeed a subjective moral change, the turning of the will to God, it is only the *first step* towards the forgiveness of sins (since repentance must begin by turning to God); and that penitence involves many other steps — going to God as the prodigal went to his father, and using the means provided by God in His Church. For the father, after his son's confession, directed his servants to put on him the *first* robe. It is not the best robe as in our translation, but the first robe (*στολὴν τὴν πρώτην*), that is,

the robe which he possessed before he left his father's house, and which belonged to him as a son.

In other words, the putting on him of the first robe is the restoration of the privileges of sonship; and while this takes place at the father's command, his servants or ministers are the instruments appointed by him to carry out his loving purpose in restoring to his son what he had lost when he left his father's house. Similarly the priests by Absolution, at God's command, restore to the penitent sinner the grace of his baptism, which he has forfeited by sin, and put on him the first robe — the robe of righteousness with which he was clothed in baptism.

Thus we see that in the parable of the Prodigal Son, which is generally quoted as the great authority for rejecting all ministerial intervention or assistance in the work of repentance, is contained an episode which, if it means anything at all, implies precisely what the Church teaches about Absolution, namely, that, while God alone can forgive sins, He uses the ministry of His Church to impart to the penitent that Absolution which is both the assurance of forgiveness, and the restoration of the former grace (the baptismal robe) which had been forfeited by sin.

We may frankly recognize that there is nothing *illogical* in the position, that a sinner can go direct to God for forgiveness, that there are no sacra-

mental means of grace in the Church, her ordinances being merely outward symbols, of no use as conveying grace, but of value as witnessing before the world to a subjective moral change in the recipient. There is nothing illogical in this view. The only question is whether it accords with the teaching of Holy Scripture, and with the *unanimous* testimony of Christendom for the first fifteen hundred years of her history (that is, until the rise of sectarianism), and with the belief of the immense majority of Christians since then.

This view also necessarily demands the rejection of the Holy Communion as an *objective* means of grace. According to most sectarian teaching its only value is to remind the recipients of our Lord's death, and by this remembrance to stir up in them certain emotions of love for Christ and for one another; and, further, to witness to their Christian fellowship. Here again we have the questions, Is this consistent with our Lord's words in Holy Scripture, and is it in accord with the teaching of His Church? To both of which we must reply emphatically, It is not.

For our purpose in this chapter we may divide Christians into two classes: those who reject all sacramental ordinances, that is, who deny that they are necessary means of grace; and those who accept them as ordained by Christ Himself as the ordinary

means whereby the fruits of His Incarnation and Atonement are imparted to individual souls. We have endeavoured to show in chapter three that the evidence, both in the Bible and in the Church, for Absolution stands on much the same ground as the evidence for Baptism and the Holy Eucharist, and our answer to the first class, who deny that there is any such power as Absolution given by Christ to His Church, is contained in that chapter, wherein we show step by step the authority for it in the Bible, in the Church at large, and in our own Prayer Book.

The second class of objectors, for whom this book is specially written, are those members of our own Communion, who, while accepting *in theory* a doctrine of Absolution, evade its practical application by putting an unnatural explanation upon the teachings of Holy Scripture and of our Prayer Book. To the consideration of their objections we shall now address ourselves.

These persons again fall into two classes: those who think that all sin, however grievous, is absolved in the public services of the Church, and that the Confession and judicial Absolution provided in the Order for the Visitation of the Sick of the English Prayer Book is either a relic of Romanism, or at most is a provision for persons with morbid consciences or disturbed by very grievous sins.

The other class timidly ventures a step further, and admits that our Prayer Book does provide a judicial Absolution, but claims that it limits it to those who are in most grievous sin, and whose consciences refuse to be quieted by the means which satisfy ordinary persons, or to people on their death-bed. So that the use of Confession, according to these, ought to be most exceptional, and practically put off until face to face with death.

Let us examine how far such objections are sustained by the teachings of the Prayer Book and of common sense; and first let us consider the position of those who hold that all sin, however grievous, is absolved in the public services of the Church. These services contain two forms of Absolution: one in the Order for Matins and Evensong, the other in that for the Holy Communion. The form in Matins and Evensong is as follows:

"Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness, and live; and hath given power, and commandment, to His Ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins: He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel. Wherefore let us beseech Him to grant us true repentance, and His Holy Spirit, that

those things may please Him, which we do at this present; and that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure, and holy; so that at the last we may come to His eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

If we examine this form, we find that it consists of three parts: 1. A declaration that the power of Absolution has been committed to God's Ministers: "Almighty God, . . . hath given power, and commandment, to His Ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins." 2. A statement that the Absolution depends for its efficacy on the penitence and faith of those who seek it: "He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel." 3. An exhortation to all so to repent that they may be entitled to this grace: "Wherefore let us beseech Him to grant us true repentance, and His Holy Spirit."

In this form we have the most emphatic assertion that God has given power and commandment to His Ministers to absolve; but there is not one word in it which suggests that the sins of those present are absolved. On the contrary, after stating the conditions of forgiveness, "He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent," the conclusion is drawn that we are to pray God to give us the grace of true repentance that we may receive what only the truly penitent are entitled to — Absolution.

The words are, "Wherefore let us beseech Him to grant us true repentance."

Now, if the words which contain the condition of Absolution, "He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent," really convey, as some suppose, that Absolution, it would be a stultification of the gift just received to go on to pray that we may have true penitence. For example: in the Baptismal Office, immediately after the act of Baptism the priest is directed to say, "Seeing now that this child *is regenerate*." He is not ordered to pray that he may be regenerated. The act which effects regeneration has been accomplished; and therefore he says, "Seeing now that this child is regenerate." Similarly, if the words "He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent" convey Absolution, there ought to follow some such statement as "Wherefore seeing that we have been absolved, let us show our thankfulness in our lives," not "let us beseech Him to grant us true repentance."

This Absolution follows a general Confession of sin, in which the whole congregation acknowledge that they have committed sins both of omission and commission. Whereupon the priest is directed to assure them that God has given to His Ministers power and commandment to absolve, and to exhort them so to repent that they may be able to come and obtain this Absolution.

The Absolution in the Communion Office is, however, of a more definite character. It is as follows:

"Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Who of His great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him; Have mercy upon you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and bring you to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Here, after the declaration that Almighty God has promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him, there is the prayer that God may "have mercy upon you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and bring you to everlasting life." But to whom is this Absolution addressed? It is preceded by a general confession; and the rubric before this is: "Then shall this general Confession be made, in the name of all those that are minded to receive the holy Communion." It is, therefore, as clear as words can possibly make it, that this Confession and Absolution are limited to those who are *minded* to receive the Holy Communion, and that they do not apply to any one else.

But preceding this rubric we have four separate forms of exhortation; in the first of which we are reminded of "the great peril of the unworthy receiv-

ing thereof" (*i.e.*, of the Holy Communion), and are directed "so to search and examine our (your) own consciences, . . . that we (ye) may be received as worthy partakers of that holy Table." Then follow directions for a most thorough self-examination, leading up to the declaration, "Therefore if any of you be a blasphemer of God, an hinderer or slanderer of his Word, an adulterer, or be in malice, or envy, or in *any other grievous crime*, repent you of your sins, or else come not to that holy Table." And, in explanation of the way in which this repentance is to be practised, we are told that "if there be any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned Minister of God's Word, and *open his grief;* that by the ministry of God's holy Word he may receive *the benefit of absolution*,[1] together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness."

In effect this exhortation says that you must not come to the Holy Communion without most careful self-examination. If your self-examination reveals that you have upon your conscience "*any* grievous sin," you must so repent that your con-

[1] This last clause is omitted in the American Prayer Book, but the direction to "open his grief" is retained.

science shall be satisfied, and if you have any doubt about it, you are to come to some priest, "open your grief," that is, make your Confession, and receive the "benefit of Absolution."

The Prayer Book asserts that you *must* come to the Holy Communion with a quiet conscience; therefore, that if you are able to quiet your own conscience, you may come. But who can quiet his own conscience when his self-examination reveals to him that he is in mortal sin? There are some doubtless who can do this, but in their case very often a quiet conscience means only a dead conscience. It is the quiet of death, not of life. They have forgiven themselves; but this is no assurance that God has forgiven them, when they are neglecting the very means of grace, appointed for that purpose by Christ Himself and referred to in the next section of the exhortation: "If any man cannot quiet his own conscience, let him come to me, and open his grief, and receive the benefit of Absolution."

Is it not a fair inference from this exhortation to say that it tells us to examine ourselves carefully, and, where we are in mortal sin, to go to a priest and seek the benefit of Absolution, but that where we are not in mortal sin, we can come to the Holy Communion, and in the precatory Absolution therein provided receive the remission of venial sin?

This is precisely in accord with the teaching of

S. John, to which we have already referred; for he says: "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them which sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death." [1] Here S. John indicates that prayer is sufficient for the remission of "sin not unto death," that is, of venial sin; hence, for those who are only in venial sin, the priest prays that God may have mercy upon them, pardon and forgive them all their sins. S. John, however, very carefully points out that "there is a sin unto death"; in regard to which he remarks, "I do not say that he shall pray for it"; that is, he implies that something more than prayer is needed for the remission of mortal sin.

The third form of Absolution, found in the Visitation of the Sick,[2] is judicial. In this the priest, as Christ's representative, judges of the sins confessed, and pronounces the sentence of acquittal; and, as this is a Sacrament, it conveys the grace of Absolution. Observe that the difference is not in the form of words. Probably the form in the Communion Service would be sufficient, as until the twelfth century the precatory form was used both in the East and the West, and in the East its use continued to be universal until quite recently. The great difference

[1] 1 S. John v. 16–17.

[2] See page 44.

is that one form is an integral part of a Sacrament, and the other is not. For it is of the essence of a Sacrament that it should be administered to an individual; and one might as well assert that a clergyman, by reading the Baptismal Service, baptizes all in the congregation who happen to be unbaptized, as think that by saying a form of Absolution over them he absolves all those who are in *mortal* sin.

A very little thought will convince us that no Sacrament can be administered *en masse*. We have to come as individuals to be baptized, to be confirmed, to receive the Holy Communion; and we must come as individuals to receive the Sacramental grace of Absolution, that is, the grace which remits *mortal* sin; for, as S. John says, prayer is sufficient for the forgiveness of venial sin.

If our Church taught, as some think, that the Absolution of mortal sin could be obtained in the public services of the Church, the exhortation we have been considering would have directed persons, after examining themselves "by the rule of God's commandments," and confessing to Almighty God, "with full purpose of amendment of life," to go to Church and get absolved when the Absolution was pronounced in the Communion Service; but it does nothing of the kind. It does not suggest in any way that they can get absolved at Church. It tells them that they are to make sure that their consciences

are quiet *before they come to Church.* If there is any question about it, they are to make their Confession to a priest, and obtain from him the benefit of Absolution.

There can be very little doubt respecting the intention of those who drew up this exhortation. It was to tell those who did not believe in Sacramental Confession and Absolution, to manage their own penitence the best way they could; but if they found that this was not a success, to go and make their Confession.

Our Church undoubtedly does not compel her children to use Sacramental Confession. She leaves them free to make their peace with God in their own way, only warning them that it is requisite that they should come to Communion "with a quiet conscience"; that is to say, that before Communion their peace with God must have been made. Nowhere, however, does she imply anything so absurd as that a public prayer said over those "who are minded to receive the Holy Communion" can give them Sacramental Absolution from mortal sin.

To those who accept the position that a doctrine to be Catholic (and therefore binding upon us) needs only to have the three characteristics of *universality, antiquity,* and *consent,* there can be no question about the matter; for there was no public Absolution in any Eucharistic Service of the Church until

the sixteenth century, and no public Matins and Evensong. There was in the Breviary Offices, from the time of S. Basil, a prayer for pardon; but these Offices were Monastic, often said by laymen, and there was no idea that this prayer conveyed any remission of *mortal* sin.

In the service of the Holy Eucharist in the Western Church, the first proof of any such Absolution dates from the Third Council of Ravenna, A.D. 1314. It was then ordered that throughout the Province of Ravenna the Confiteor should be said in a form very similar to that used in the Roman Church at the present time; and since the publication of the Missal of Pius V., who died A.D. 1572, this has been the use of the Roman Church.

The theory, therefore, that people can be sacramentally absolved apart from the Sacrament of Penance has neither universality, antiquity nor consent to recommend it. Such a theory was quite unknown until the sixteenth century, and is still alike foreign to both the Roman and Greek Communions. Either our reformers invented a new Sacrament, which is absurd, or our Absolution in the Communion Office is merely a prayer for the Remission of *venial* sin.

We have still to consider the objection of the other class in our Church, who, while admitting that our Prayer Book does provide a judicial Absolution, limits it to those whose consciences refuse to be

quieted by the means which satisfy ordinary persons, or to people on their death-bed. These would say that the Offices of the Visitation of the Sick in the English Prayer Book, and for the Visitation of Prisoners under sentence of death in the American book, only refer to such exceptional cases.

If, for the sake of the argument, we were to admit that this were true (which we do not), we should have to choose between the horns of a dilemma: either (1) that since the Prayer Book does enjoin Confession and Absolution in sickness or before death, it certainly ought not to be put off until then, lest on these occasions we should be deprived of the opportunity of making our Confession, and receiving Absolution; or (2) if this be not admitted, then we must accept the teaching that our Church believes *only* in a death-bed repentance, and encourages her children to put off repentance until their death.

It will be observed that the first position really grants our contention, that, since Confession and Absolution should be used in sickness or before death, therefore we should not wait till then, but should avail ourselves of the earliest opportunity of placing our souls in such a state that death may not find us unprepared.

The second horn of the dilemma is nothing less than monstrous. Most certainly we must believe in the *possibilities* of a death-bed repentance, but

only under exceptional circumstances. There is one such case in the Bible, that of the penitent robber; but, as has often been observed, only one. One, that no one may despair; only one, that no one may presume. The case, too, of the penitent robber was most exceptional. He seems to have been a man who had lived a wild life of robbery and violence, and who probably had never really come in contact with religion until he met our Blessed Lord. He was converted by Christ Himself, and proved the thoroughness of his conversion by bearing a most terrible punishment, not only with heroic patience and resignation, but with the confession that it was just; for he said, "We receive the due reward of our deeds." [1] Further, he manifested wonderful faith in his prayer to Christ: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

Few persons, if any, who wilfully put off their repentance till their death-bed could expect at that time the grace of so wonderful a conversion and repentance. But, quite apart from this, it is *unreasonable* to put off till our death-bed anything of importance; for we know well that in most cases there is no opportunity of attending to it at the time of death, or, if there is, we are not likely to be in a condition to avail ourselves of it; for death is generally preceded by much physical weakness and pain,

[1] S. Luke xxiii. 41.

when the memory is so clouded that it is not possible to make an examination of our whole life; and even if we could do this, the effort to confess all our sins would probably be beyond our strength.

Moreover, we know that the family are often in ignorance of the lethal condition of the patient, and, where they know it, from motives of false kindness, do their best to conceal it from him. Further, in our times the custom of the medical profession (with some notable exceptions) is to give anæsthetics, which, while they allay pain, render the patient totally incapable of any mental effort; so that a large number of persons are sent drugged into eternity.

If, however, this should not be our case, and by the mercy of God we should be in possession of our faculties, and know that we are dying, there is still the great difficulty of making a first Confession when we have never been taught how to prepare for it, and there is, therefore, the danger that our Confession will be very superficial and inadequate, and, what is still worse, that the motives of our penitence will be *fear* of the consequences of our sins, not *sorrow* for them from the love of God.

We have already pointed out that a man to be forgiven must be forgivable, that there must be in him possibilities of a moral change. What possibilities of a moral change are there on one's death-bed? We have also shown that it is not every sort of

sorrow which worketh repentance, certainly not that sorrow which is caused by fear of punishment or remorse at what we have lost.

Altogether, therefore, we may repeat, without fear of contradiction, that the teaching which would lead us to delay till our death-bed our Confession and Absolution, if these things are really important, is indeed a monstrous doctrine, and that it most certainly is not the teaching of our Church. If the direction to move the sick man to a special Confession of his sins, and to absolve him, is only found in the Visitation of the Sick, it is because that is the only Office in the Prayer Book in which there is provision for a priest ministering to an individual soul.

The other services deal with his public ministrations. But in the only one in which the Prayer Book provides for the needs of an individual soul in penitence, there is the explicit direction that there shall be a special Confession of sin and a judicial Absolution.

There are many who may persuade themselves that their consciences are not troubled with any weighty matter; that is, that they have never committed a mortal sin; and such may take the ground that they do not need Absolution. There are, however, few who have been through life without committing one mortal sin. There are very few, therefore, who can safely neglect altogether the

means of grace specially instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ, and enjoined by His Church, for the remission of sins. To say again and again in the Creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins"; to pray many times a day, "Forgive us our trespasses," and to refuse to use the *only revealed means* by which we can have any assurance of the forgiveness of sins, is a position which a conscientious and thinking man must decline to defend.

CHAPTER IX

OBJECTIONS TO CONFESSION

In dealing with objections to Confession we find ourselves on very different ground to that occupied by the objections to Absolution; for these latter were chiefly matters which could be decided by an appeal to the written letter of Holy Scripture, to the Prayer Book, and the Canons of the Church. The objections to Confession, however, to a great extent are of a different character, for they are largely based on private opinion or prejudice. But fair-minded persons must admit that such objections must be judged by the testimony of two classes only — those who have used Confession and those who have heard Confessions; for it is not unreasonable to rule out of court the evidence of those whose opinions or prejudices are absolutely unsupported by any practical experience of the subject.

At the outset we may affirm, without fear of contradiction, that every priest who has heard Confessions, and almost every one who has been to Confession, would testify to its spiritual benefit, and to the baselessness of the charges brought against it.

I say *almost* every one, because there may be some who have come to Confession without penitence, or even from wrong motives, who have therefore failed to experience its benefits. We would press upon the reader to keep carefully in mind, and to give due weight to the fact that all such evidence as would be accepted in a court of law — that is, the evidence of those who have practical knowledge of the subject — is in its favour, while almost all that is brought against it is the mere opinion of those who have had no personal experience in the matter, and is therefore evidence entirely inadmissible in law; in other words, that the *facts* are all in its favour, and that it is only *theories* which are brought against it. With this proviso we shall proceed to a consideration of the chief objections found in Protestant writers.

I. The first is that Confession to a priest obscures the great doctrine of the Mediatorship of Jesus Christ, that He is the one Mediator through Whom we can go direct to God, and that to make our Confession to a priest is inconsistent with this fundamental truth.

There are three distinct answers to this:

1. It is true that there is but "one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus;" [1] and yet we find that one Mediator appointing a priesthood, and instituting Sacraments. Nor is this

[1] 1 Tim. ii. 5.

inconsistent with the experiences of ordinary life; for we may say there is but one king who rules over a country, but that king appoints ministers to carry on different parts of the government. Similarly, priests are God's ministers and ambassadors.[1]

To this it may be objected that ministers and ambassadors have their powers distinctly defined by the sovereign whom they represent. This is quite true; and we find the definition of the powers of the priesthood in our Lord's commission to them: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. . . . Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."[2] If the exercise of this power interferes with our Lord's mediatorial office, at least it was our Lord Himself who gave the power and enjoined its use.

2. Are not the Sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist liable to the same objection? If you can go straight to God, why use the ministrations of a priest to be baptized or to receive the Holy Communion? We say in the Creed that we believe in "one Baptism for the remission of sins." But a person cannot baptize himself; and the minister who baptizes, and thus remits sins according to Christ's appointment, is in exactly the same position as the priest who absolves.

[1] Cf. 1 Cor. iv. 1; 2 Cor. v. 20. [2] S. John xx. 21.

Precisely the same difficulty arises in regard to the Holy Communion. We cannot obtain it without a priest. But does this interfere with our Lord's mediatorial office? If not, then why should we think that Absolution does? Let us be consistent, and either give up Baptism and Communion, or accept all the Sacramental ordinances *ordained by Christ Himself*.

3. People say that the Bible teaches that we can go direct to God, and obtain from Him forgiveness, without any human intervention. In reply we would ask, Where does it teach this? Can you point out one single instance in Holy Scripture which justifies this statement? Probably many would refer to the parable of the Prodigal Son,[1] who went to his father and said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee." But, as we have already shown, he made his confession in the presence of the servants, and it was to the servants that the father gave the command, "Put on him the first robe."[2] In the same manner, Sacramental Confession is made directly to God, but in the presence of the priest, to whom God has given power and commandment to declare and pronounce the absolution and remission of sins.

II. The second objection we shall notice is often stated somewhat as follows: Holy Scripture nowhere

[1] S. Luke xv. 11–32. [2] See page 98.

tells me to confess my sins to a priest, but it does bid Christians confess their sins to one another.

Here again two answers are required:

1. Holy Scripture did tell the Jews that they were to confess their sins to a priest; for we read that "the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the Lord, and that person be guilty; then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof . . . unto the Lord, even to the priest; beside the ram of the atonement, whereby an atonement shall be made for him." [1]

Again we find, "And it shall be, when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing. . . . And the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin." [2] But the priest could not make an atonement unless he knew what the sin was, since different sins required different sacrifices for atonement.

This Confession, which was enjoined by the Mosaic law, was practised by Achan to Joshua;[3] by David to Nathan;[4] and in the New Testament by the Jews to S. John the Baptist.[5] Our Blessed Lord

[1] Num. v. 5–8.
[2] Lev. v. 5–6.
[3] Jos. vii. 19.
[4] 2 Sam. xii. 13.
[5] S. Matt. iii. 6.

must have observed it frequently in the Temple courts, yet He never said one word to discourage it; and after His Ascension we find the Ephesians confessing to S. Paul.[1]

So the first part of the objection, that the Bible does not tell us to confess our sins to a priest, is scarcely borne out by the facts.

2. The second part is that the Bible does bid Christians to confess their sins to one another. This evidently refers to the passage in S. James beginning "Is any sick among you? let him call for the *elders of the church*. . . . Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."[2]

The only persons who are mentioned are the elders or presbyters of the Church, that is, the priests. Further, we would ask, Are you in the habit of confessing your sins to one another? It will certainly do you a great deal of good, even though you do not get Absolution. If you are not, then you are clearly disobeying the very command in Holy Scripture to which you refer.

III. Confession to a priest was not the primitive rule of the Church. In the early Church, Confession was made in public, and Absolution was given in public.

[1] Acts xix. 18.

[2] S. Jam. v. 14–16.

This is quite true, as we have already pointed out,[1] and there can be no objection (except on your own part) to your making your Confession in public, and receiving the Absolution publicly, only you must observe that in the primitive Church the priest or bishop who absolved publicly had heard the Confession, and knew what the sins were which he was absolving. This objection can have no force whatever unless you are prepared in your own case to substitute for the private Confession to a priest the public Confession of the primitive Church.

IV. We now come to a different class of objections — those which are based entirely upon private opinion or prejudice. First among them we will consider the charge that Confession weakens the will and diminishes the sense of personal responsibility.

This, of course, must be decided solely upon the evidence of those who have used Confession; since it is quite certain that those who have not used it cannot know whether it weakens the will or not. But the testimony of those who go to Confession is precisely the opposite, that it strengthens their will to resist sin, and that this is the reason they use it.

Furthermore, they would also bear witness that it deepens their sense of responsibility. For priests frequently hear from the lips of lapsed penitents

[1] See page 40.

the statement, I cannot come to Confession and go back and do the same things, which is equivalent to saying that the coming to Confession awakens such a sense of personal responsibility that, while one who does not use Confession *may* go on committing the same sins, one who does use it *dare* not do so.

V. Another charge brought against Confession is that it fosters a morbid craving for sympathy. The reply is quite simple: Those who have a *morbid* craving for sympathy will most certainly strive to satisfy it, and it is far less dangerous for them to go to a priest who is a skilled physician of souls, and who will endeavour to correct what is morbid in them, than that they should go to some sympathetic friend, who, with the best intentions, would encourage that morbidness.

VI. Confession gives a priest an undue influence in a person's life.

This requires careful consideration. In the first place we may observe that this applies equally to one's physician and one's lawyer; that the knowledge of the diseases of our body, and of the difficulties in which our estate is involved, undoubtedly does give to the physician and to the lawyer a certain influence with us; indeed, we go to them that they may influence us by their advice. It would be very absurd to go to a lawyer for advice, having predetermined that we will not be influenced by

what he says. Certainly the affairs of our soul are of equal importance to the health of our body or the prosperity of our estate. And since we go to a physician or to a lawyer, believing that their advice will influence us in the right direction, there is no reason why we should assume that a priest will influence us in the wrong direction.

The power of influence is one of the greatest powers in the world. But God has willed that it should be so. He means us to influence one another for good; and He will hold us responsible for our influence. The sternest utterance of our Blessed Lord was, "Woe unto the world because of offences" [1] (that is, stumbling blocks). And probably the greatest stumbling blocks arise from evil example, that is, from evil influence. But because some influence is evil that is no reason why we should reject all influence; and, if we have a right to expect good influence from any one, it surely is from a priest of God, administering one of the most solemn Sacraments of the Church.

We must remember, too, that in our own Communion we are entirely free to choose our own confessor; and if we have any reason to suppose that he is trying to exercise an undue influence over us, we are quite at liberty to go to some one else, and never to go to him again.

[1] S. Matt. xviii. 7.

So that this objection is not really very practical; and, like the two previous ones, it must stand or fall upon the evidence of those who have used Confession, since those who have not can have no knowledge whether a priest exercises undue influence or not.

VII. The next objection generally takes this form, that only benighted Romanists go to Confession, and a few in our own Church who had better be Romanists.

This charge, of course, can be answered best by statistics, and our objectors will probably be a little surprised to hear that Confession has commended itself to and is used by *the great majority of Christians in the world;* for, if we turn to any census of the world's religions, we shall find that Christians belonging to the Roman, Greek, and Anglican Communions comprise more than three fourths of all who profess the name of Christ. The figures vary in different census-tables; but this variation does not really affect the proportion I have stated. Counting in amongst Protestants every sect which calls itself "Christian," however slender may be its claim — Mormons, Christian Scientists, Dowieites, and those members of our own Church who would reject this doctrine — they scarcely make up one quarter of the Christian world.

The census-tables of M. Fournier De Flaix,

quoted as the most recent competent authority by the American Statistical Association, gives:

Roman Catholics	230,866,533
Orthodox or Greeks	98,016,000
Anglicans	29,200,000
Abyssinian Church	3,000,000
Other Eastern Churches . . .	1,960,000
Protestants of every Sect . . .	114,037,625
Total of Christians	477,080,158

From these tables we shall see that it is not only "benighted" Roman Catholics who use Confession, but Orthodox Greeks to the number of ninety-eight millions, Abyssinians, three millions, other Eastern Churches almost two millions, besides a considerable number of our own Communion.

Further, we would draw attention to the fact that the Greek Church is even more opposed to the Roman Church than we are, and yet they are quite as strict as the Romans in requiring Confession of their communicants.

The fair inference to be drawn from these statistics surely is that Confession has commended itself and does commend itself to the great majority of Christians, that is, practically *to all who have used it;* and that those who reject it are mostly persons whose prejudices have prevented them from having any

experimental knowledge of the subject, so that their opinions are quite worthless, and by all laws of evidence should be ruled out of court.

If the effects of Confession had proved harmful, it is extremely unlikely it would have continued so many centuries, and still more unlikely that in the great Catholic revival in our own days it would have found such a ready acceptance by the *most earnest* laymen as well as priests, both in England and America.

VIII. Some persons object to Confession because, they say, it is contrary to the principles of the Reformation. I suppose that all will admit that the principles of the Reformation are best expressed in the English Prayer Book which the Reformation produced, and in the writings of the Reformers themselves.

To begin with the Prayer Book, we find in the First Prayer Book of Edward VI., 1549, in the Communion Office, the following statement about Confession:

"And if there be any of you, whose conscience is troubled and grieved in any thing, lacking comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned priest, taught in the law of God, and confess and open his sin and grief secretly, that he may receive such ghostly counsel, advice, and comfort, that his conscience may be relieved,

and that of us (as of the ministers of God and of the church) he may receive comfort and absolution, to the satisfaction of his mind, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness: requiring such as shall be satisfied with a general confession, not to be offended with them that do use, to their further satisfying, the auricular and secret confession to the priest; nor those also which think needful or convenient, for the quietness of their own consciences, particularly to open their sins to the priest, to be offended with them that are satisfied with their humble confession to God, and the general confession to the church."

In the Second Prayer Book, 1552, we have almost precisely the exhortation of the present English Prayer Book; and this is found in Elizabeth's Prayer Book, 1559, and that of James I., 1604. It is, therefore, quite certain that in every English Prayer Book the duty of Confession under certain circumstances has been plainly taught.

Let us turn now from the Prayer Book to the writings of individual Reformers. The three most celebrated, I suppose, are Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, since they were selected for commemoration in the Martyrs' Memorial at Oxford. I shall give one extract from each, though it would be very easy to find many more passages in their writings bearing upon Confession.

Cranmer says: "God dothe not speake to us with a voyce soundynge out of heaven. But He hath given the kayes of the kingdom of heaven, and the authoritie to forgyve synne, to the ministers of the Churche. Wherefore let him that is a sinner go to one of them, let him knowledge and confesse his synne, and praye him that, according to God's commandmente, he will gyve him absolution, and comforte him with the word of grace and forgiveness of his synnes. And when the minister dothe so, then I ought stedfastly to believe that my synnes are truly forgiven me in heaven." [1]

Bishop Ridley says: "You have known me long indeed: in the which time it has chanced me, as you say, to mislike some things. It is true, I grant: for sudden changes without substantial and necessary cause, and the heady setting forth of extremities, I did never love. *Confession unto the minister*, which is able to instruct, correct, comfort, and inform the weak, wounded, and ignorant conscience, indeed I ever thought might do much good to Christ's congregation, and so, I assure you, I think even at this day." [2]

Bishop Latimer says: "But to speak of right and true Confession, *I would to God it were kept in Eng-*

[1] Cranmer's Catechism, p. 202.

[2] Letter to Master West, his chaplain. See Eccles. Biog. Vol. iii. p. 67.

land; for it is a good thing. And those which find themselves grieved in conscience might go to a learned man and there fetch of him comfort of the Word of God, and so come to a quiet conscience. . . . And sure it grieveth me much that such confessions are not kept in England." [1]

Canon 113 of the Church of England, put forth in 1603, refers thus to the sacramental seal in Confession: "Provided always, That if any man confess his secret and hidden sins to the Minister, for the unburdening of his conscience, and to receive spiritual consolation and ease of mind from him; . . . we do straitly charge and admonish him, that he do not at any time reveal and make known to any person whatsoever any crime or offence so committed to his trust and secrecy (except they be such crimes as by the laws of this realm his own life may be called into question for concealing the same), under pain of irregularity."

"Irregularity," we may explain, not only deprives a man of all spiritual promotion for the present time, but makes him utterly incapable of any for the time to come, and therefore is the greatest penalty, except degradation from the priesthood, to which a priest can be subject.

Between the years 1619 and 1679 a series of Visitation Articles were set forth by certain bishops, ten

[1] Sermon on the 3d Sunday after Epiphany, Vol. ii. p. 852.

of whom (Bishops Overall, Andrewes, Montague, Lindsell, Dee, Duppa, Juxon, Wren, Fuller, and Gunning) inquired:

1. As to the persons excommunicated and of their obtaining their Absolution.

2. Whether the Minister exhorted those troubled or disquieted to open their grief, that they may by the Minister receive the benefit of Absolution.

3. Whether the Minister revealed any crimes or offences, so committed to his trust and secrecy, contrary to the 113th Canon.

It would be quite easy to multiply the names of bishops and divines in the Church of England, from the Reformation down to the present day, who have taught the importance of Confession to a priest, and have themselves practised it; but those already given are surely sufficient to prove the point, including, as they do, such saintly and representative men as Andrewes and Overall, and such thorough-going reformers as Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer.

To this objection, therefore, we may reply that, so far from the Reformers objecting to Confession, they *explicitly* declared their entire agreement with it.

IX. The last objection we shall notice is that Confession has been abused. This is, perhaps, true; but certainly such abuse has been very rare in the Church of England, and not nearly as fre-

quent as abuse of similar confidences between patient and physician, or lawyer and client. It is very doubtful whether those who bring forward this objection could show one instance within their own knowledge in which Confession had been thus abused. But since our Church leaves her children free to go to whomsoever they please for Confession, she has provided a simple and adequate remedy; for no one need go a second time to any priest whom he thought took a wrong advantage of his office in administering this Sacrament.

As a matter of fact and experience, the real danger is not in going to Confession to a priest in the open church, with all the protection of sacramental solemnity; but in long, confidential talks in a private room, with no such safeguard. These have led again and again to scandal, and are to be avoided. They minister often to a morbid craving for sympathy, and they lead to nothing of any value, since the priest is sought, not for the benefit of Absolution, but at best only for advice.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

We are now in a position to gather up the results of our investigation; and they may be stated somewhat as follows:

We are taught in the Creed to believe in the forgiveness of sins, and in the Lord's Prayer to pray for this.

We find that forgiveness flows from God's love, and belongs to His nature; so that His "nature and property is always to have mercy and to forgive." And we learn from our Lord Himself that, in regard to this forgiveness, there is no limit either to its frequency or to its extent.

In response to a question of S. Peter's, Christ tells us that we are to forgive not "until seven times," but "until seventy times seven"; and in this He is proposing for our standard nothing less than the long-suffering and mercy of God Himself. Further, in the parable which follows, He contrasts the compassion of the king, who freely forgives the enormous debt (ten thousand talents) which no servant could pay, with the petty exaction of the unmerciful servant

in cruelly enforcing the payment of so paltry a sum as one hundred pence.

In this very passage, however, which so fully sets forth the frequency and extent of God's mercy, our Lord draws attention to the fact that this mercy has its conditions; that the individual who seeks it, in order to obtain it must be forgivable; that is, that God must see in him possibilities of moral change and improvement, and that these possibilities must be realized on his part by true repentance.

Having thus satisfied ourselves that the forgiveness of sins involves repentance, we further find that our Lord has provided in Holy Scripture and in His Church a means by which the sinner may manifest his penitence and receive the assurance of the forgiveness of his sins, this assurance being conveyed to him, together with the forgiveness of sins, by Absolution, and his penitence being manifested by Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction.

All this we have seen is set forth in Holy Scripture, and clearly taught in our Prayer Book. Our Church, however, throws the responsibility for using this means of grace upon each individual, refusing to make the practice of Confession and Absolution compulsory, but providing that all shall be *daily* reminded that God has given power to His ministers to absolve, and *daily* exhorted to pray for true repentance.

This general teaching we find specially applied to individual needs in three other Offices in the Prayer Book. In the Ordination of Priests the forgiveness of sins is specified as the peculiar function of the priesthood. In the Communion Office, in the instruction on the manner of preparation for Holy Communion, we are taught that, because it is requisite that no man should come but with a quiet conscience, therefore, if any man cannot quiet his own conscience, he is to go to a priest and make his Confession to him, and receive Absolution. In the order for the Visitation of the Sick, which is the only provision in the Prayer Book for the private ministration of a priest to an individual soul, the priest is directed to move the person to a special Confession of his sins; and a very solemn and direct form of Absolution is provided, in which the authority to absolve is claimed and exercised.

We are taught that in order to obtain Absolution we must be penitent, and that penitence consists of three parts: Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction; although Confession and Satisfaction are really contained in Contrition, and are the fruits by which it is manifested.

Lastly, we have considered all the principal objections brought against Absolution and Confession, and have found that there is not one of them which cannot be easily met and answered; and that Con-

fession has commended itself to, and is used by, the great majority of Christians throughout the world.

Here our work ends; and the writer would only add that he would much regret to see Confession made compulsory in our Church; that he would advise those who do not desire to use this Sacrament by all means to stay away from it, but that he commends to the prayerful consideration of all who are conscious of sin, and who earnestly desire forgiveness, the facts set forth in this little book, and the testimony of those who have used Confession.

Laus Deo

Works by the Rev. Alfred G. Mortimer, D.D.

Rector of S. Mark's, Philadelphia

HELPS TO MEDITATION. Sketches for Every Day in the Year.

Vol. I. 17th edition. Advent to Trinity. 8vo. 7*s.* 6*d.*
Vol. II. 14th edition. Trinity to Advent. 8vo. 7*s.* 6*d.*

CATHOLIC FAITH AND PRACTICE. A Manual of Theology. In two parts. Crown 8vo.

Part I. Fourth edition, revised. pp. xlvi + 362. 7*s.* 6*d.*
Part II. Second edition, revised. pp. lxxi + 556. 9*s.*

THE EUCHARISTIC SACRIFICE. An Historical and Theological Investigation of the Sacrificial Conception of the Holy Eucharist in the Christian Church. With Introduction by the Rev. T. T. Carter, M.A. Crown 8vo. pp. lxx + 608. 10*s.* 6*d.*

THE CREEDS. An Historical and Doctrinal Exposition of the Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds. Crown 8vo. pp. xx + 321. 5*s.* net.

MEDITATIONS ON THE PASSION OF OUR MOST HOLY REDEEMER. In two parts. Crown 8vo. 5*s.* each.

JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION. Thirty Addresses for Good Friday and Easter. Crown 8vo. 5*s.*

SERMONS IN MINIATURE FOR EXTEMPORE PREACHERS. Sketches for Every Sunday and Holy Day of the Christian Year. Crown 8vo. 6*s.*

NOTES ON THE SEVEN PENITENTIAL PSALMS. Chiefly from Patristic Sources. Small 8vo. 3*s.* 6*d.*

LEARN OF JESUS CHRIST TO DIE. Addresses on our Lord's Words from the Cross, taken as Teaching the Way of Preparation for Death. 16mo. 2*s.*

THE LAWS OF PENITENCE. Addresses on our Lord's Words from the Cross. 18mo. 1*s.* 6*d.*

THE LAWS OF HAPPINESS; or, the Beatitudes as Teaching Our Duty to God, Self, and Our Neighbour. 18mo. 2*s.*

STORIES FROM GENESIS. Sermons for Children. Crown 8vo. 4*s.*

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

London, New York and Bombay

Works by the Rev. Alfred G. Mortimer, D.D.

Rector of S. Mark's, Philadelphia

THE CHURCH'S LESSONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN YEAR. 120 Sermons. 2 vols. 8vo. 6*s.* each.

THE LAST DISCOURSES OF OUR LORD. Arranged as Readings for the Forty Days of Lent. Crown 8vo. 5*s.* net.

LENTEN PREACHING. Three Courses of Sermons for Lent. Crown 8vo. 3*s.* 6*d.*

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE IN THE SEVEN LAST WORDS. 2*s.*

IT RINGETH TO EVENSONG. Thoughts for Advancing Years. Crown 8vo. 3*s.* 6*d.*

WHO COMES? Preparation and Thanksgiving for Holy Communion. 1*s.* 6*d.*

SKEFFINGTON AND SON

34 Southampton Street, Strand, London

LIFE AND ITS PROBLEMS. A volume of Sermons. 3*s.* 6*d.*

THE CHIEF VIRTUES OF MAN TAUGHT IN THE SEVEN WORDS FROM THE CROSS. 2*s.*

BROWN, LANGHAM, AND CO.

78 New Bond Street, London

STUDIES IN HOLY SCRIPTURE. A volume of Sermons.

RIVINGTONS

34 King Street, Covent Garden, London